RECORDING STUDIOS ON TOUR: THE EXPEDITIONS OF THE VICTOR TALKING MACHINE COMPANY THROUGH LATIN AMERICA, 1903-1926

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Sergio Daniel Ospina Romero

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Sergio Daniel Ospina Romero, PhD

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During the early twentieth century, recording technicians travelled around the world on behalf of the multinational recording companies. Producing recordings with vernacular repertoires not only became an effective way to open local markets for the talking machines that these same companies were manufacturing. It also allowed for an unprecedented global circulation of local musics. This dissertation focuses on the recording expeditions lead by the Victor Talking Machine Company through several cities in Latin America during the acoustic era. Drawing from untapped archival material, including the daily ledgers of the expeditions, the following pages offer the first comprehensive history of these expeditions while focusing on five areas of analysis: the globalization of recorded sound, the imperial and transcultural dynamics in the itinerant recording ventures of the industry, the interventions of "recording scouts" for the production of acoustic records, the sounding events recorded during the expeditions, and the transnational circulation of these recordings.

I argue that rather than a marginal side of the music industry or a rudimentary operation, as it has been usually presented hitherto in many histories of the phonograph, sound recording during the acoustic era was a central and intricate area in the business; and that the international ventures of recording companies before 1925 set the conditions of possibility for the consolidation of

media entertainment as a defining aspect of consumer culture worldwide through the twentieth century. Furthermore, by focusing on the interactions between Victor's traveling recording agents and multiple performers and intermediaries in Latin America, I question top-down narratives of the international dimension of recording companies and offer, instead, a complicated picture of improvisation, untidy imperialism, intercultural misunderstandings, colonial desire, sundry sound recordings, and multimedia entanglements.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sergio Ospina Romero grew up in Bogotá, Colombia, where he studied music with emphasis on piano performance, anthropology (B.A. 2004) and history (M.A. 2013). In the United States he completed a masters (2017) and a PhD (2019) in Musicology at Cornell University, where he was also a Don M. Randel Teaching Fellow. His research activities deal primarily with sound reproduction technologies, mechanical reproduction, transnationalism, popular music, and jazz in the early twentieth century. He is the author of *Dolor que canta: La vida y la música de Luis A. Calvo en la sociedad colombiana de comienzos del siglo XX* (ICANH, 2017) and of various book chapters, articles, and reviews about Latin American music, published in the United States and Latin America. Between 2010 and 2014 he was a lecturer in historical anthropology at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, in Bogotá. He is member of the American Musicological Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, the Latin American Studies Association, and of the Latin American branch of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music. In the fall of 2021, he will start a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of Music at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. He is the director and pianist of *Palonegro*, an ensemble of Latin American music and Latin jazz.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Two years ago, I published a book about Luis Antonio Calvo, a Colombian composer popular during the first half of the twentieth century. In a way, this dissertation is a sequel to that book. But not the kind of sequel that picks up where the previous book (or movie) ended. This is more like when a particular scene, situation, or character in the first story is granted a story of its own; a sequel that branches from an undeveloped theme or detail in the original plot. One day, while studying the registers of what used to be the *Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings*, I discovered that, over the course of three days, Calvo played the piano in 21 different recordings when Victor "sent" a portable machine to Bogotá in 1913. At that point in my research, it was merely another interesting fact in Calvo's biography. I had read about that portable machine and similar recording incursions in a few music histories, but in most of them those incidents were treated generally as historical anecdotes or as passing references to account for the moment when local musics made their way, for the first time, into the realm of sound recordings. Victor's machines, or the hardly ever mentioned employees who managed the recording equipment, were like ghostly actors who suddenly appeared and abruptly vanished. As my doctoral studies took off, I began to dig into the vestiges of such transnational recording ventures and found a fascinating and unexplored research path—the branch towards another scholarly expedition of my own. And here I am, with a whole new story to tell.

I am profoundly grateful to all the people and institutions that have, in one way or another, supported me and contributed to the successful completion of this project. My doctoral studies and my research were funded by the generous aid of

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To say that my dissertation committee was exceptional in every conceivable way, and that their mentorship inspired me and propelled my career beyond my expectations would be an understatement. Thanks to Alejandro L. Madrid for being a remarkable interlocutor, for providing the best possible example of what outstanding scholarship truly means, and for his unswerving support—*mucho más allá de lo que dicta el deber*; to Benjamin Piekut for his detailed revisions and for making me aware of so many blind spots: if academia is like a highway, your advice helped me avoid countless accidents; to Steve Pond for his candor, truthfulness, and unforgettable teachings, and for Palonegro-ing with me so many times with such fervent musicality; and to Roberto Sierra for offering such a sophisticated perspective in my affairs around composition, arranging, and music theory. In many ways, David Suisman, Karl H. Miller, Anaar Desai-Stephens, and Fritz Schenker were almost like additional members of my committee. I am glad I had the opportunity to meet them, share my work with them, receive their feedback

and encouragement, be alerted about many other blind spots, and ultimately, count them among my close intellectual interlocutors and friends.

At Cornell I found an ideal environment to thrive. My deepest gratitude goes to the faculty and students in the Department of Music and across campus who nourished my academic and personal ventures in multiple and meaningful ways, including Trevor Pinch, Roger Moseley, Annette Richards, Jeremy Braddock, Paul Merrill, Judith Peraino, David Yearsley, Ernesto Bassi, Raymond Craib, Catherine Appert, Rebecca Harris-Warrick, Xak Bjerken, Andrew Hicks, Neal Zaslaw, Christine Bacareza Balance, Jordan Musser, Dietmar Friesenegger, Matthew Hall, Max Williams, Zoe Weiss, Becky Lu, Can Bilir, Jonathan Schakel, Ji Young Kim, Carlos Ramirez, David Miller, Elizabeth Lyon, Mackenzie Pierce, Aya Saiki, Annalise Smith, Lee Tyson, Rafael Torralvo, Carlota Aguilar, Andrew Zhou, Morton Wan, Sergio Cote Barco, Daniel Hawkins, Thomas Cressy, Juan Carlos Melendez-Torres, Josh Savala, Susana Romero, Sebastián Díaz Ángel, and Tanvi Solanki.

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John Bolig, David Seubert, Peter Martland, Dick Spotswood, Diego Bustos, Lindsay Wright, Heather MacLachlan, Gisela Cramer, and William Buckingham. Yet, I am the only one to blame for the shortcomings in the following pages.

If I were to mention all the people in Ithaca and far beyond that I would like to thank for their support in the past few years while I was working on this dissertation, the list would be unbearably long. Thank you all for being there for me and for being so gracious with me. My heart-felt thanks to my parents, the indefatigable Graciela Romero and [*el doctor*] Hugo Ospina, my brothers Walter, Oscar, and Cristian, and my many and beloved relatives in Bogotá, Fusagasugá, las Rozas de Madrid, and Sotaquirá, as well as to Dominic and Inés Versage, Edward Davis, Pamela Chandler Woodall, Ekaterina Pirozhenko, the amazing members of Palonegro—past, present, and future—Joe Salzano, Julie Paige, *la comunidad latina de* Hasbrouck, and, most decisively, thank you to J. S. Bach, Tom Jobim, Eddy Palmieri, Michel Camilo, Chick Corea, and countless other composers whose music, along with the love, hugs, kisses, smiles, and playfulness of Daniel and Samuel, keep energizing me all along. And thank you God. Your faithfulness and care exceed the limits of the imaginable.

This dissertation and the book that will be soon developed out of it are dedicated to the one and only Martha Mateus—*mi preciosa M. No tengo suficientes palabras para agradecerte por tanto apoyo, amor, y cariño tan inmerecidos. Sigo pensando que eres demasiado perfecta para ser parte de este mundo, y yo demasiado imperfecto para tenerte a mi lado. "Sólo tengo ojos para ti."*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

¿El acento? ¡Pero es un pequeño país que te sigue!
Es un poco, este acento, equipaje invisible,
la charla de hogar que llevas de viaje.

—"L'Accent" (excerpt) poem by Miguel Zamacoïs (1866-1955)

Several years ago, while I was an undergraduate student in anthropology in Colombia, I took a road trip from Bogotá, a city in the Andean Mountains, at 8,600 feet above sea level, to the city of Barranquilla, by the Caribbean coast of the country. The trip was sponsored by the university and was a requirement in a class on ethnographic methods that I was taking with the legendary ethnomusicologist Carlos Miñana Blasco. Not going on the trip was not an option. I can hardly remember if there were any provisions for special circumstances that could excuse a student from undertaking the journey. Probably there were, but no one really pursued anything different than securing a spot in the white van, carefully signaled with the university logo. The mention of the logo is not irrelevant. Those were complicated years in Colombia due to the armed conflict between the military forces of the government, different guerrilla groups, and paramilitary organizations—an intricate and insufferable scenario fraught with violence, drug trafficking, political patronage, corruption, and economic crisis. Driving through certain parts of the country was indeed a risky venture. Yet, the logo of the university on our van functioned as a kind of safeguard across different check points, representing simultaneously a public emblem and a hub of critical thinking, the alma mater of many actors at both ends of the political spectrum.

It was not only that we had to go on such an excursion due to academic regulations or some kind of exhilaration instigated by either or both the fascination with the subject and the anxiety of being closer to the red zones of the conflict. It was also that the fulfillment of the ethnographic program behind the trip depended on our physical presence in the area—carrying out fieldwork, conducting interviews, hanging around, interacting with a host of individuals, eating, drinking, listening, dancing, and experiencing life *in situ*. As committed as we were toward the completion of our ethnographic rituals of initiation, *being there* was simply compulsory. Thus, along with my fellow proto-ethnographers, I packed my bags, endured hours of un-stretched legs inside the van as it hastened through seemingly boundless routes, became acquainted with many new accents and foods, wrote profusely in my journal, and paid my ethnographic dues.

Nowadays, it seems that there is an increasing tendency to do more and more things remotely. It is not only that the spread of the internet has connected people as never before, but also that many activities that just a few years ago inevitably required going back and forth between physical places have been engulfed by the convenience of virtual encounters. Along with online banking, online dating, online and proxy weddings, and many other internet-only services, some undertakings that a couple of generations ago would have been regarded as nonsensical at best—such as cyber-tourism, multi-sited recording projects, or computer-based ethnographies—are now as quotidian and ordinary as going to the supermarket was for our grandparents.

This dissertation is about a series of sound recording ventures in the early twentieth century that—as with my ethnographic recruitment—were contingent upon the traveling dispositions of people and objects. If the goal of making the

recordings was to be achieved, not going was not an option. Between 1903 and 1926, before the advent and popularization of microphones and loudspeakers, the Victor Talking Machine Company arranged more than twenty recording expeditions to multiple places in Latin America with the purpose of expanding its record catalogs and engaging more consumers into its commercial orbit. This research is the first comprehensive study of such expeditions. My approach to them is informed by an interdisciplinary perspective based on methods and epistemological concerns that come primarily from musicology, ethnomusicology, sound and technology studies, cultural history, and anthropology. Within a broad arc built over interlocking issues of imperialism, improvisation, and media production, I consider five specific areas of analysis: first, the globalization of the recording business and the emergence of "foreign" and "ethnic" as marketing categories at the beginning of the twentieth century; second, the mundane interactions between corporate representatives of metropolitan recording companies—hereafter referred to as recording experts or recording scouts—and local individuals, for the sake of the arrangement of itinerary and makeshift recording studios; third, the processes of technological and commercial mediation in the production of sound recordings before 1925—the so-called acoustic era; fourth, the music and other kinds of sounding events recorded during the expeditions, examined in light of nascent paradigms of phonograph culture as well as in relation to matters of performativity, auditory practices, and decolonization; and finally, the consideration of these recording campaigns with regard to the post- and neocolonial scenarios of extractive economies as well as the interplay of cosmopolitanism and modernity in the global circulation of local musics.

By focusing on the international dimension of the Victor Talking Machine Company, I inquire into the social and cultural implications of the invention of the phonograph, and into the process through which the technology of capturing sound gave way to an unprecedented business. The newness of both the technology and the business implied a continuous redesign of the material products (phonographs and records), and a constant adaptation of commercial models, marketing strategies, and musical contents. By the time of the second expedition (Mexico 1905), Victor had already established itself as the leading recording company in the United States. By means of its corporate agreement with the British Gramophone Company, the appeal of its flat discs, and the unparalleled success of some of its "exclusive stars," such as Enrico Caruso and John Philip Sousa's band, Victor consolidated a durative and profitable business in North America—represented by millions of sales in records containing mostly operatic renditions and U.S. popular music.[1] Yet, the rest of the planet offered an appealing and unexploited area of business, and Victor expanded internationally very soon and very rapidly. Nevertheless, the recording industry had been in many ways global from its inception. Edison's initial business model with the phonograph included a series of circus-like demonstrations with echoes in various parts of the world before the turn of the century; and also, by the early 1900s, the demand for original musical content was being supplied by recruiting international performers.[2] Concurrently,

[1] Pekka Gronow, "The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium," *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 58–60; Walter L. Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo: The Acoustic Years of the Recording Industry, 1877-1929* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, c1994), 73–129; David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 104.
[2] Gary Cross and Robert Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures. How Technology and Marketing Revolutionized Desire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 134–35; Patrick Feaster, "'The Following Record': Making Sense of Phonographic Performance, 1877–1908" (Ph.D., Indiana University, 2007), 70–74; Juan Pablo González Rodríguez and Claudio Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile, 1890-1950*, 1. ed (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2003), 179; Andre J.

recording tours became a crucial strategy for the purposes of the international outreach of recording companies based in Europe and the United States. Although almost every major company in the business at the time engaged in one way or another with foreign or ethnic repertoires, Victor and the Gramophone Co. proved the most visible players in the game of sending recording technicians abroad. By virtue of an agreement between them, Victor was granted the commercial prerogative over the Americas, besides other marketing territories elsewhere, and very soon the unremitting deployment of experts and equipment across Latin America became a corporate norm.[3]

My research is guided by the following questions: How might the consideration of the everyday activities of recording scouts on the ground challenge top-down narratives about the global spread of the music industry? Which networks were constituted for the realization of the fieldtrips, the recruitment of local performers, and the production and transnational circulation of the recordings made during the tours? And what were the social, aesthetic, economic, and political contours of phonograph culture in Latin America during the acoustic era, and how did they relate to the nascent world of media entertainment more broadly? Based on extensive archival research—performed via both on-the-ground and remote interactions—the subsequent chapters attempt to answer these questions as thoroughly and intelligibly as possible. In the rest of this introduction, I examine relevant scholarly literature and theoretical perspectives as a backdrop toward both the specific contributions of this work and a brief outline of the chapters that follow.

Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, 2nd ed (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52–59; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 125–49; James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890-1950*, 9 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 61–62.

[3] Pekka Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry* (London; New York: Cassell, 1998), 11–31.

Writing About Sound Recording in the Acoustic Era

The early engagements of ethnographers with sound recording technologies and the use of the phonograph as a tool in ethnomusicological research have been examined critically in anthropology, ethnomusicology, media studies—from the ground-breaking work of Kay Kaufman Shelemay and Erika Brady to the later contributions made by Jonathan Sterne, Aaron Fox, Brian Hochman, Roshanak Kheshti, and others.[4] However, the traveling endeavors of recording companies have received much less attention. With the exception of the brief consideration of the subject in the scholarly work of Pekka Gronow, George Brock-Nannestad, and Karl Hagstrom Miller as well as the research on the recording journeys of Fred Gaisberg and the information on "recording pioneers" gathered by Hugo Strötbaum, it is fair to say that the field of the commercial recording expeditions during the acoustic era is almost totally unexplored.[5] In regard to Latin America, the dearth of

[4] See: Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Recording Technology, the Record Industry, and Ethnomusicological Scholarship," in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*, ed. Bruno Nettl and Philip Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 277–292; Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 310–33; Aaron Fox, "Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity," in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip Bohlman, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 522–54; Brian Hochman, *Savage Preservation : The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Roshanak Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

[5] See: Pekka Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings: An Introduction," in *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, ed. American Folklife Center, Studies in American Folklife, no. 1 (Washington: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 1982), 1–49; George Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis for the Production of High Quality Transfers from Pre-1925 Sound Recordings" (Audio Engineering Society Convention 103, Audio Engineering Society, 1997), 1–29; Karl Hagstrom Miller, "Talking Machine World: Selling the Local in the Global Music Industry, 1900-20," in *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local*, ed. A. G. Hopkins (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 160–90; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010); Frederick William Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round*, 1st printing. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1942); Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Sound Revolutions: A Biography of Fred Gaisberg, Founding Father of Commercial Sound Recording* (London: Sanctuary, 1999); Hugo Strötbaum, ed., *The Fred Gaisberg Diaries. Part 1: USA and Europe (1898-1902)*, 2010, www.recordingpioneers.com; Hugo Strötbaum, ed., *The Fred Gaisberg*

studies about the activities of Victor and other companies is noteworthy. Victor's expeditions as well as the inclusion of local musics in early recording campaigns in general have been mentioned only briefly, or even taken for granted in many music histories dealing with specific Latin American countries.[6] The remarks on early Latin American discographies made by Richard Spotswood, and the recent contributions by Marina Cañardo on the recording industry in Argentina during the 1920s, by Juliana Pérez González about the dawn of the recording business in Brazil, and by Juan Fernando Velásquez on the configuration of listening habits around sound reproduction devices in Colombia, are notable exceptions.[7]

Some of the leading figures in the fields of historical discographies and sound-recording studies, including Pekka Gronow, Richard Spotswood, Susan

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Diaries. Part 2: Going East (1902-1903), 2010, www.recordingpioneers.com; Hugo Strötbaum, "Recording Pioneers," accessed December 17, 2018, http://recordingpioneers.com/.

[6] See for example: Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*, Pitt Latin American Series (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 101; Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 1997), 48; John Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 192–93; Susan Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana's Lyric Stage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Ketty Wong, *Whose National Music?: Identity, Mestizaje, and Migration in Ecuador* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 76; Joshua Tucker, *Gentleman Troubadours and Andean Pop Stars: Huayno Music, Media Work, and Ethnic Imaginaries in Urban Peru* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 55–56; Jaime Cortés Polanía, *La música nacional y popular colombiana en la colección Mundo al Día: 1924-1938* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2004), 154; Egberto Bermúdez, *Historia de la Música en Santafé y Bogotá, 1538-1938* (Santafé de Bogotá: Fundación de Música, Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2000), 115–23; Egberto Bermúdez, "From Colombian «National» Song to «Colombian Song»: 1860-1960," *Lied Und Populäre Kultur / Song and Popular Culture* 53 (2008): 225–30; Egberto Bermúdez, "Cien años de grabaciones comerciales de música colombiana. Los discos de 'Pelón y Marín' (1908) y su contexto," *Ensayos. Historia y Teoría del Arte* 17 (2009): 87–134; Juliana Pérez G., *Da música folclórica à música mecânica: Mário de Andrade e o conceito de música popular* (São Paulo: Intermeios, 2015); Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music and National Identity in Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); González Rodríguez and Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile, 1890-1950*, 124; Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 120.

[7] Richard Spottswood, *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893 to 1942*, 7 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Richard Spottswood, "Appendix: Caribbean and South American Recordings," in *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919*, ed. by Tim Brooks (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 523–30; Marina Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas: comienzos de la industria discográfica en la Argentina (1919-1930)* (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2017); Juliana Pérez G., "A indústria fonográfica e a música caipira gravada. Uma experiência paulista (1878-1930)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 2018); Juan Fernando Velásquez, "(Re)Sounding Cities: Urban Modernization, Listening, and Sounding Cultures in Colombia, 1886-1930" (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2018).

Schmidt-Horning, and David Seubert have specifically underscored the need for research projects concerning recording excursions overseas, and Latin America in particular. Gronow, for instance, wrote in 1982: "[t]he role of the United States record industry in Latin America is a puzzling mosaic that has been little studied," while Spotswood remarked in 2004 that "Victor and Columbia were preparing [by 1910] to cover significant parts of the hemisphere (…); occasional traces of their activities in the 1910s survive, though not enough to create a complete historical document. It is a story worth pursuing."[8] Drawing on archival material scarcely considered in previous investigations, namely the travelogues and recording ledgers of the Victor expeditions and other primary documents, this work is in many ways a response to their call.

This dissertation offers an alternative perspective to available accounts about the international dimension of the sound recording business at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 2015, Michael Denning published *Noise Uprising*, a book that examines the "musical revolution" that took place between 1925 and 1930 when—due to the advent of electrical recording—countless inexpensive records featuring vernacular musics were produced and disseminated on a global scale.[9] Although Denning studies the period that follows the events I cover in this dissertation, both the subject matter and the broad scope of his book are intricately related with various aspects of my work. Notwithstanding the relevance of many of his discoveries and the originality of his ideas, some of his conclusions are certainly

[8] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 16; Spottswood, "Appendix: Caribbean and South American Recordings," 530; see also Susan Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound: Technology, Culture, and the Art of Studio Recording from Edison to the LP* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 273, 275. Personal communication with David Seubert, project director of the *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, hosted by the University of California in Santa Barbara, the biggest (and growing) database of early discographies. See: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php

[9] Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2015).

problematic in light of my research. While offering a fitting challenge to the histories of the recording industry's globalization that are usually grounded on narratives around either or both "the metropolitan crazes for exotic musics" and "the global spread of US popular music," Denning argues that "the vernacular music revolution [of 1925-1930] emerged from the soundscape of working-class daily life in an archipelago of colonial ports."[10] However, the essentialist nature of some of his claims disregards crucial cultural, musical, and industrial processes that took place before such a "musical revolution," while portraying, for the same matter, the recording scene of the late 1920s as an isolated, almost spontaneous historical formation. He writes, "[t]he recording boom amplified this musical revolution: for the first time, the musics of these working-class neighborhoods were recorded and circulated by the commercial record industry."[11] By advancing the argument that it was indeed an unprecedented "revolution," Denning shows, on the one hand, the striking increase in records production and exports from metropolitan companies right after the emergence of electric recording in 1925; and on the other, the dramatic decrease in production and sales as a result of the Great Depression in 1929.[12]

In spite of how telling the figures are, Denning might be overestimating that period, or at least underestimating the engagement of recording companies with vernacular musics in the global south during the acoustic era. As I show throughout this dissertation, the picture in Latin America was one of an ongoing pursuit of both repertoires and markets since the early 1900s. As recording experts and other corporate agents traveled through the region, interacting with local performers and

[10] Denning, 6.
[11] Denning, 6.
[12] Denning, 75–77.

local entrepreneurs, the business began to thrive and so did phonograph culture. There was certainly a massive production of records with vernacular musics in the late 1920s, but the conditions of possibility for such a scenario were created during the acoustic era.

Rather than being dormant, waiting for the appearance of electrical recording to make the business possible, recording companies—and recording experts more directly—acted resourcefully and improvised their way along with the possibilities and limitations of the technology of acoustic recording, as I discuss in chapters two and three. And the same was true in relation to their marketing strategies, their accommodation to aesthetic and cultural sensibilities, and the incorporation of a diverse range of sounding events into their records catalogs—which is part of the scope of chapter four. It is clear that primary sources are more abundant for the electric period than for the acoustic era. Yet, taking such misfortune, whether consciously or not, as a rationale for technological determinism poses a serious problem. In Denning's account, just as in many other histories of the phonograph and the recording industry, electric recording is presented as the main (or only) catalyst for the globalization of recorded sound—an idea that is usually paired with the inaccurate assumption of acoustic technology as rudimentary.[13] In the history that unfolds in the following chapters, I alternatively

[13] For instance, Denning writes: "Just as Gutemberg's movable-type printing press made possible the flowering of vernacular language publishing, and eventually marginalized (…) Medieval Latin (…) so the electrical gramophone quickly enfranchised the musical vernaculars of the world, and turned the notation-based European concert music of 1600 to 1900 into a new Latin, and henceforth 'classical music'." (Denning, 7). See also: Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph: From Edison to Stereo*, (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965); Eric Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," in *The Bristol Sessions: Writings about the Big Bang of Country Music*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and Ted Olson (Jefferson, N.C: Mcfarland & Co Inc, 2005), 7–11; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Robert Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 263; Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

present the transnational development of the recording industry as an intricate combination of technological, entrepreneurial, social, cultural, political-economic, and libidinal factors.

Along these lines, I take issue with two more generalizations about the acoustic era in Denning's work: that both recorded sound and vernacular musics were marginal areas in the music industry, and that phonograph culture engaged elite sectors exclusively. As he puts it, the "worldwide recording boom [of 1925-1930] (…) established new centers of the musical universe. On the one hand, electrical recording placed recorded music, hitherto a relatively minor aspect of the business of music, at the center of the music industry; on the other, the *turn* to the vernacular made popular musicking, which had rarely been notated and was on the periphery of the industry, the center of modern music."[14] And elsewhere he asserts: "the acoustic recording boom in the decade before World War I concentrated on the most cultivated and consecrated musics. This was as true in Istanbul, Havana, and Bombay, as in London and New York. The apparatuses of cylinders, discs, and talking machines were initially marketed as parlor furniture for the households of the established and cultivated classes."[15] As I argue throughout this work, but especially in chapters one and five, the case of the Victor Talking Machine Company makes evident that a commercial empire of global proportions was built and quite established through the acoustic years—even in spite of WWI and other economic challenges. Furthermore, I show that the recorded sound business had indeed *turned* to "vernacular popular musicking" long before 1925. And certainly not only to music and nor only to the parlors of "cultivated classes"—as the

[14] Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 67–68, my emphasis.
[15] Denning, 86–87, see also: 72-73.

recordings and the sources that I examine in chapter four make it clear. Likewise, the marketing dynamics associated with the recording expeditions in particular and the dissemination of Victor's commercial empire more broadly show that the recording and commercialization of vernacular sounding events predated in many places, including the United States, the popularization of operatic recordings and other "highbrow" products—as William Kenney and David Suisman have already shown.[16] It might be fair to say that in many Latin American countries, in regard to recorded sound, local popular musics came first and Caruso came later. But vernacular musicking more broadly thrived already, and resonated globally, still in the acoustic era, as records sales and the transnational crazes around tango and maxixe in 1913-1914, and "jazz" after 1917 demonstrate.[17]

Denning is right in pointing out that despite the agency of metropolitan record companies in the process, the vernacularization of recorded music marked not (just) a new mode of colonization but "the soundtrack to (…) the decolonization of the globe"; indeed, it represented a decolonization of the ear: "a sonic revolution that remade the modern musical ear."[18] In this respect, contrary to the predominant view that accentuates the subjugation of vernacular music-making to the profit-making dynamics of capitalism and the production of commodities, Denning

[16] See William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Suisman, *Selling Sounds*.
[17] See Gronow, "The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium"; Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*; Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*; Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Bruce Johnson, "The Jazz Diaspora," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. David Horn and Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33–54; E. Taylor Atkins, ed., *Jazz Planet* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Philip Bohlman and Goffredo Plastino, eds., *Jazz Worlds, World Jazz* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Alejandro L. Madrid and Robin Moore, *Danzón: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jeremy F Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism: Music, "Race," and Intellectuals in France, 1918-1945* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013); Frederick Schenker, "Empire of Syncopation: Music, Race, and Labor in Colonial Asia's Jazz Age" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2016).
[18] Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 9, 10.

emphasizes the extent to which these forms of musicking within the purview of the recording industry operated as a decolonizing factor in itself—the *noise uprising*—one with direct implications in broader processes of political decolonization. Still, I consider that we should not lose sight of the (neo)colonial and imperialistic overtones that accompanied the international outreach of the sound recording business. As hard as it is to achieve a balance between the analysis of colonial and decolonial dynamics in relation to the extraction and dissemination of sound, my presentation throughout this work, and particularly in chapter five, is driven by an attempt to keep both sides of the coin in perspective.

This dissertation studies Victor's recording expeditions to Latin America over the course of a little over two decades. While each chapter looks into a particular facet of these expeditions, there is an analytical arc that articulates their specific considerations. This arc works as a threefold cord with identifiable yet intricately entwined strands: imperialism, improvisation, and media production. Rather that compartmentalizing the various aspects pertaining to the historical configuration of these recording ventures into discrete and independent categories—such as the sounding phenomena, the cultural context of production, and the macroeconomic subtleties—my approach to such aspects is informed by the simultaneous interplay of Victor's imperial agenda, the extemporaneous decisions of recording scouts on the ground, and the figuration of acoustic records and the acoustic technology in the emerging world of media entertainment. In a nutshell, I study the improvisatory interplay of the imperial configuration of Victor's sound recording business in Latin America. While I engage with issues of empire more directly in chapters one and five—dealing respectively with the company's international expansion and its articulation with transcultural patterns of extraction—my examination of those

processes is illuminated by the off-the-cuff character of Victor's activities in the region and the distinctiveness of sound within the universe of U.S. imperial businesses. Likewise, the various kinds of improvisations I analyze in chapters two, three, and four—focused on the recording scouts, the technology, and the recordings themselves—are pondered *vis-à-vis* the imperial and entrepreneurial agenda of the company.

Sound recording in the acoustic era, I argue, was a social formation cultivated by broad cultural trends around listening, mechanical reproduction, bourgeois aspirations, and consumerism; inevitably seized and developed *vis-à-vis* the parameters of unbridled capitalism; and upheld by novel, renewing, and contingent desires for cosmopolitanism and modernity.[19] Yet, notwithstanding the imperial overtones and the corporate rationalization in place, the unfolding of Victor's Latin American expeditions—just as the unfolding of the music industry and of the U.S. market empire more broadly—was not a predesigned process. On the contrary, messy stories, complicated interactions, unforeseen outcomes, unexpected circulations, and an ongoing revamping of technologies, repertoires, and commercial strategies proved the common ingredients of a business recipe that slow-cooked in the oven of modernity as it was being prepared.

Conceptualizing Empire, Improvisation, Recorded Sound, and Latin America

In what follows now I will offer some brief theoretical considerations in relation to the main concepts that frame my study of Victor's expeditions, as a way to contextualize the chapter outlines that comes right after. Empire and imperialism

[19] See: Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 2–9; Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*, xx; Alejandro L. Madrid, *Nor-Tec Rifa!: Electronic Dance Music from Tijuana to the World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25.

are indeed crucial categories here. In the most conventional way, "empires" are conceived as formations that are constituted and defined primarily in relation to the exercise of political power over a determined territory and a subordinated group of people. Correspondingly, imperialism usually refers to the processes, practices, strategies, techniques, and modalities through which imperial power is "established, extended, or maintained."[20] While I concur with this characterization of imperialism, my use of empire throughout this dissertation has been informed, following the lead of cultural history and new imperial studies, by a broader frame that accounts for the multiple dimensions of imperial rule—beyond and alongside the political realm. These dimensions include, but are not limited to, the commercial, representational, discursive, mental, and sonic (or audible) spheres.[21] The market empire of the Victor Talking Machine Company in the early twentieth century was shaped in light of this multidimensional set of coordinates. At the same time, however, the specific traits of the sound recording business entailed the configuration of an "audible empire" in the sense given to the term by Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan.[22] Building on their ideas, I also interrogate the extent to which the operations of the sound recording industry during the acoustic era, epitomized in this work by Victor's

[20] Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6–7.
[21] See Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo Donato. Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007); Frank A. Ninkovich, "The New Empire," in *The Imperial Moment*, ed. Kimberly Kagan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 141–68; Go, *Patterns of Empire*, 6; Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism*; and Schenker, "Empire of Syncopation."
[22] Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan, eds., *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

incursions across the Americas, constituted "an audible formation" with imperial overtones.[23]

While I keep an eye on the economic factors that fueled and upheld Victor's activities, my approach is driven by an attempt to go beyond the solely economic materiality of its empire. Thus, it is, along with other works in the new wave of imperial studies, an alternative narrative to that of economic determinism that was pervasive in classic studies of imperialism and in many historical accounts of U.S.-Latin America relations informed by ideas from dependence theory.[24] Following Radano and Olaniyan, I pay attention to the "immaterial forms" of "imperial action"—including sound and other things "we cannot touch, feel, or see"; hence, sound becomes not only "a colonizing force in the rise of empire," but also "a key tool in imposing other forms of discipline and order."[25] In this light, the colonizing impetus of the recording industry belongs to the same genealogy of audible imperial interventions that include, out of many instances: the invasion and control of spaces and habits through sonic means (e.g., church bells), the imposition of Western languages and music theory, the imperial sounds of marching bands or canonical repertoires, the appropriation and re-fashioning of local terms at the whim of empires' political and intellectual agendas, the incursion of sound and

[23] Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan, "Introduction: Hearing Empire—Imperial Listening," in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, ed. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 13.
[24] See Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Published for the American Historical Association [by]Cornell University Press, 1967); William Appleman Williams, *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: J. Wiley, 1972); Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973); Charles W Bergquist, *The Social Origins of U.S. Imperialism, or, Linking Labor and LaFeber* (Seattle, Wash.: Center for Labor Studies, University of Washington, 1993); and William Appleman Williams, *A William Appleman Williams Reader: Selections from His Major Historical Writings*, ed. Henry W. Berger (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1992).
[25] Radano and Olaniyan, "Introduction: Hearing Empire," 2.

communication technologies, and the use of sonic weapons.[26] Along with all this, my conception of empire builds also on two ideas that have gained more scholarly traction recently: first, that rather than a unique form of soft power, the international operations of the United States in the early twentieth century were indeed part of a "hard" imperial agenda, contingent on its historical scenario but not substantially different from the undertakings of other empires in the past.[27] And second, that rather than orderly, logical, or controlled entities, empires are messy formations, constituted and sustained in conditions of incoherence, unevenness, incompleteness, and even anarchy.[28]

This characterization of empire is intricately related with another of the crucial conceptual staples of this dissertation: improvisation. Following on the notion of "contact zones" developed by Mary Louise Pratt, I explore the transnational and transcultural encounters between Victor's recording scouts and multiple performers and collaborators in Latin America *vis-à-vis* their improvisations around logistical matters, technological arrangements, and musical events. Rather than specific geographic configurations, contact zones operate as physical, social, or discursive spaces for the interplay of imperial hegemony as well as for the

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[26] Radano and Olaniyan, 2–5; Sterne, *The Audible Past*; Geoffrey Baker, *Imposing Harmony: Music and Society in Colonial Cuzco* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Denning, *Noise Uprising*; Alejandra Bronfman and Andrew Grant Wood, eds., *Media, Sound, and Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Juliette Volcler, *Extremely Loud: Sound as a Weapon*, trans. Carol Volk (New York: The New Press, 2013).

[27] See Amy Kaplan and Donald E Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Gilbert M. Joseph, "Close Encounters: Toward a New Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations," in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo Donato. Salvatore (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 3–46; Frank A. Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Kimberly Kagan, ed., *The Imperial Moment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Go, *Patterns of Empire*.

[28] Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

negotiation and exchange of cultural parameters.[29] My use of the word "improvisation" throughout this work is informed primarily by two interrelated conceptual frameworks; on the one hand, the fluidity of social and music improvisations as discussed recently by Daniel Fischlin, George Lipsitz, Georgina Born, Gabriel Solis, George Lewis, Benjamin Piekut, and other scholars in the fields of critical improvisation studies and jazz; and on the other, the notion of improvisation advanced by Stephen Greenblatt in the late 1970s.[30] The improvisations performed by Victor's recording scouts and local performers in matters of music, technology, and everyday situations, as well as by the recording industry as a whole in terms of international trade, labeling, or marketing entailed various layers and degrees of spontaneity, fortuitousness, inadvertency, and co-creation. At the same time, however, the rationalizing force of modern industrial capitalism furnished the backdrop of their extemporaneous activities. In other words, building on Greenblatt's ideas, the improvisations that drove the global expansion of the recording industry were grounded on the ability of corporations

[29] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6–7; Joseph, "Close Encounters: Toward a New Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations," 5.

[30] See Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Co-Creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw, eds., *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); George Lewis and Benjamin Piekut, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Gabriel Solis and Bruno Nettl, eds., *Musical Improvisation: Art, Education, and Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Dale Chapman, *The Jazz Bubble: Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018); Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Improvisation and Power," in *Literature and Society. Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1978*, ed. Edward W. Said (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 57–99. See also: Bruno Nettle and Melinda Russell, eds., *In the Course of Performance. Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Solis and Nettl, *Musical Improvisation*; David Borgo, *Sync or Swarm: Improvising Music in a Complex Age* (New York: Continuum, 2005); David Toop, *Into the Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom: Before 1970* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); Michael C. Heller, *Loft Jazz: Improvising New York in the 1970s* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 65–70, 86–93, 133–34.

and their traveling representatives to "capitalize on the unforeseen and transform given materials" into profitable scenarios.[31]

Recorded sound is indeed a central notion in this work, and one that I engage with directly at some length in chapters three and four when dealing with theoretical matters surrounding phonography, reproducibility, transmission, and indexicality. Nonetheless, a couple of words are due here. To begin with, as established above, I conceive sound as a social formation—just as an empire is also a social formation. Although Samuel Morse, Alexander Graham Bell, and Thomas A. Edison referred respectively to the telegraph, the telephone, and the phonograph as their "babies"—reinforcing the narrative in which inventions appear as children of white male creators—sound reproduction technologies emerged as the crystallization of "larger cultural currents," as Jonathan Stern explains. Rather than "primary agents of historical change," "divine actors" or "mysterious beings with obscure origins that come down from the sky to 'impact' human relations," these technologies are part of a broader history of audile techniques, that is, a long history of the development of specialized listening spaces and practices.[32] Or as Erika Brady puts it for the case of the phonograph, taking into account that it was both radically novel and an expected development in the context of larger trends in communication, technology and media: it was "a marvelous inevitability."[33]

The work of media theorists Jesús Martín-Barbero and Brian Hochman has been also particularly relevant to my research. Martín-Barbero has argued for a shift from media analysis to an analysis of social mediations, that is, to the ways in which media further the articulation and negotiation between private and public

[31] Greenblatt, "Improvisation and Power," 60; see: Chapman, *The Jazz Bubble*.
[32] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 7, 87–99.
[33] Brady, *A Spiral Way*, 11–14.

spheres, between highbrow and lowbrow realms, and between hegemonic and subordinated sectors. In the context of Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century, there was a correlation between processes of mass mediation—via the phonograph and other cultural devices such as radio and cinema—with various nationalistic projects around music and the configuration of a collective imaginaries about the nation.[34] In a similar vein, Hochman highlights the role of media in racial formation, that is "'the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed over time". Hence, media makes race intelligible, and somewhat naturalized, for massive audiences.[35] But certainly not only race, but also other social and cultural categories such as gender, ethnicity, otherness, and nationhood—as Micol Seigel, Alejandra Bronfman, Gisela Cramer, and others have shown.[36] I find appealing Hochman's idea that "the phonograph inscribes preexisting ideas about race and cultural difference into the groove of history. It stores them; it renders them audible; it transforms them into commodities and circulates them in global flows of culture and capital."[37] Victor's operations in Latin America, entangled with and in relation to the

[34] Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations* (London: SAGE Publications, 1993); see: Cortés Polanía, *La música nacional*; González Rodríguez and Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile*; Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Alejandro L. Madrid, *Sounds of the Modern Nation: Music, Culture, and Ideas in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 2008); Matthew B. Karush, *Culture of Class Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920-1946* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Marc A. Hertzman, *Making Samba: A New History of Race and Music in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Carolina Santamaría Delgado, *Vitrolas, rocolas y radioteatros: hábitos de escucha de la música popular en Medellín, 1930-1950* (Bogotá, D.C: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2014); Oscar Hernández Salgar, *Los mitos de la música nacional. Poder y emoción en as músicas populares colombianas, 1930-1960* (La Habana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas, 2015).
[35] Hochman, *Savage Preservation*, xx–xxi.
[36] Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*; Bronfman and Wood, *Media, Sound, and Culture in Latin America*; Gisela Cramer, "The Word War at the River Plate: The Office of Inter-American Affairs and the Argentine Airwaves, 1940-46," in *¡Américas Unidas!: Nelson A. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940-46)*, ed. Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2012), 213–48.
[37] Hochman, *Savage Preservation*, 114.

manifold hemispheric interventions of the U.S. empire in the early twentieth century, are, as I hope to show in the following chapters, an apt illustration of how the dynamics Hochman describes also played out in other contexts.

The consideration of the globalizing ventures of recorded sound in the acoustic era offers a renewed challenge to the essentialization of the nation-state as the basic unit of historical analysis, and thus complements the critique advanced in this vein by studies in cultural and transnational history in recent decades.[38] As Bruce Johnson reminds us, "the single most significant medium in the international dissemination of [music] was the sound recording (...) The advent of sound recordings bypassed notation and released music from the limits of its symbolic order and specialized knowledge restricted on grounds such as class, gender, ethnicity and physical location, giving direct access to music as sound."[39] The global commercial empire of the Victor Talking Machine Company in general, and the Latin American expeditions in particular offer an empirical window for the examination of transnational networks for the circulation of material objects (i.e., phonographs, records), people (i.e., scouts, musicians), and sounds. Although Victor capitalized on a nationalistic rhetoric for the promotion of its record catalogs, for the most part it operated on a transnational level, and in that way, it made a strategic use of the idea of "Latin America"—or the Spanish-speaking world under

[38] Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical History Review* 2005, no. 91 (December 21, 2005): 62–90; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen, "Hybrid Atlantics: Future Directions for the History of the Atlantic World," *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013): 597–609; Pierre-Yves. Saunier, *Transnational History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Frances R. Aparicio and Cándida Frances Jáquez, *Musical Migrations: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ifeona Fulani, ed., *Archipelagos of Sound: Transnational Caribbeanities, Women and Music* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2012); Radano and Olaniyan, *Audible Empire*.
[39] Johnson, "The Jazz Diaspora," 34, 36.

the umbrella of its commercial rule—in a way not radically different from the exploitation of the same idea in political and intellectual circles within the region.

My understanding of what is or conveys the term "Latin America" as well as the implications of its use throughout this dissertation have been shaped by the thought of Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, among many other thinkers. "To be sure," he writes, "'Latin America' has never designated a geographically or historically tangible reality—at least not with a minimum of empirical and conceptual rigor. Alas, the expression has worked as the title, as the generic name of a well-known plot that is both the autobiography of the term ('Latin America') and the story of a belief that has escaped extinction since its origins as an idea and a project in the 1850s."[40] For the last two centuries, the idea of Latin America has been instrumental to mobilize, on the one hand, diverse agendas and ideologies around tradition and progress, or "an alternative ontology, neither Europe nor the US"; and on the other hand, "a peculiar recasting" in the Americas of old European dichotomies that distinguished the Anglo-Saxon north from the Latin south.[41] In the imperial display of U.S. power in the early twentieth century, Latin America was indeed a category for subordination, economic opportunity, and exoticization. And the Victor company played along those coordinates. Thus, as much as the history of the recording expeditions is a chronicle about the inauguration of a host of industrial, musical, and transcultural processes around recorded sound, it is also an account of the reproduction of patterns of colonial domination. Indeed, as I will discuss in detail in chapter five, colonization is not an issue of the past. The

[40] Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1; see: Michel Gobat, "The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (December 1, 2013): 1345–75, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/118.5.1345.
[41] Tenorio-Trillo, *Latin America*, 2, 4.

extractive economies that nurtured the industrial growth and geopolitical influence of the United States, including the inconspicuous and itinerant recording laboratories set by Victor, bespoke legacies of coloniality; as such, they played a crucial role in the perpetuation of the condition of economic disadvantage of Latin American nations and peoples.[42]

Furthermore, I concur with Ana Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid, who "advocate not for a geographic determinism of Latin American musics but for the understanding of Latin America as an assembly of shared experiences, attitudes, and technologies (or lack of) that is not necessarily tied to specific geography."[43] Rather than another sobriquet for repertoires originated south the border of the United States, Latin American music (or musics) works as an identifying category for "people at supranational levels to whom precisely the label 'Latin America' makes sense."[44] Conceptualizing Latin America in this way, "as a strategy rather than a geography," fosters a hemispheric consideration of musical practices and social experiences, including those of "the Latin American diaspora in the United States."[45] Notwithstanding the semantic force of the idea of Latin America in the configuration of auditory and marketing regimes around recorded music—as in the historical processes examined in this dissertation—the perspective offered by Alonso-Minutti, Herrera, and Madrid carries the potential of deconstructing the normative use of the adjective

[42] See Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*; Jeremy. Adelman, ed., *Colonial Legacies: The Problem of Persistence in Latin American History* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; and Lina Del Castillo, *Crafting a Republic for the World: Scientific, Geographic, and Historiographic Inventions of Colombia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).
[43] Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid, "The Practices of Experimentalism in Latin@ and Latin American Music: An Introduction," in *Experimentalisms in Practice: Music Perspectives from Latin America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11.
[44] Alonso-Minutti, Herrera, and Madrid, 11.
[45] Alonso-Minutti, Herrera, and Madrid, 11.

"American" (in English) as exclusive to the United States, and advancing an intervention toward a broader, hemispheric connotation—as the same word (in Spanish) conveys.[46]

The specific contributions of this dissertation, I believe, are fivefold; and are intimately connected with the conceptual horizon I just outlined. First, I bring together sound studies and empire studies by paying attention to both the role of the recording industry in the expansion of the U.S. market empire and the imperial implications of the global dissemination of recorded sound. In this vein, my approach resembles that of some of the contributors to the recent volume edited by Radano and Olaniyan, but it also engages more directly with matters of empire and imperialism as reworked in cultural history, anthropology, and in the field of new imperial studies.[47]

Second, by focusing on the everyday activities of recording scouts, I challenge top-down histories of the phonograph and the recording industry in which the advancement of the business worldwide is explained by either the agency of the companies' heads alone or the companies themselves, in abstraction.[48] Conversely, I pursue a history from below, that is, from the mundane interactions between these recording scouts and a host of individuals over the course of the recording expeditions; by virtue of this perspective it is possible to better appreciate

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[46] See: Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), xiii–xv.
[47] See Radano and Olaniyan, *Audible Empire*; Joseph, LeGrand, and Salvatore, *Close Encounters of Empire*; De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); and Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*; Schenker, "Empire of Syncopation."
[48] See C. A. Schicke, *Revolution in Sound: A Biography of the Recording Industry* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, 1877-1977*, 2d rev. ed (New York: Macmillan, 1977); Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and Its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1995); and Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*.

the improvisatory nature of the recording business as well as the messy character of its imperial ventures.

Third, also by underscoring the interventions of these recording experts—hitherto marginal and neglected characters in the histories of the music industry—I question the frequent characterization of the acoustic technology as rudimentary and the narratives of technological determinism that have blossomed from such assumption.[49] Instead, I underscore the significance of their technical experimentations and listening dispositions for the affordance of sound recording, the cultural legitimization of acoustic records, and the viability of nascent emporiums of media entertainment.

Fourth, I offer an alternative methodological and epistemological avenue for the analysis of sound recordings.[50] Rather than studying the musical or sonic features of early recordings, I inquire into the performativity of sound production and sound reproducibility. Lastly, while suggesting that the stakes of Victor's recording expeditions could also be examined within the framework of extractive enclaves, I connect the anthropology of extractive economies—in which the music industry has not been adequately taken into consideration—with the cultural history of recorded sound, for which the colonial implications of the business in the early twentieth century still remain significantly under-interrogated.[51] The study of Victor's

[49] See Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session"; Denning, *Noise Uprising*; Millard, *America on Record*; and Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, Rev. ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[50] See Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance* (London: CHARM, 2009), http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap3.html; Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*; and Nicholas Cook, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[51] See Kenneth C. Omeje, ed., *Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Multi-Regional Perspectives on Rentier Politics* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008); Margarita Rosa Serje de la Ossa, *El revés de la nación: territorios salvajes, fronteras y tierras de nadie* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales-Ceso y Departamento de Antropología, 2005); Catherine LeGrand,

recording journeys in the acoustic era provides a new perspective on the commercial strategies, musical entanglements, and transnational networks that accompanied the consolidation of recorded popular music as a central facet of popular culture in general and of the nascent music industry in particular.

Chapters outline

Each of the following chapters scrutinizes a distinctive aspect of Victor's Latin American tours while looking into the globalizing undertakings of the early recording business from a likewise particular angle. Chapter one examines the entangled trajectories of the U.S. and Victor empires, as a way to understand the geopolitical, cultural, and entrepreneurial backdrop that informed the deployment of recording and talent scouts overseas. While exploring the commercial milieu of industrialization and burgeoning consumer culture that drove the worldwide expansion of U.S. industries, this chapter traces both the configuration of the sound recording business since the late 1880s and the formation of the Victor corporation through the 1920s, particularly in terms of its international affairs. The progressive construction of Victor's humongous factory in New Jersey works in itself as a symbolic narrative of how its commercial empire thrived in the United States and globally during the first three decades of the twentieth century; it is also a telling illustration of the expanding mechanisms of the U.S. market empire—defined

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"Living in Macondo. Economy and Culture in a United Fruit Company Banana Enclave in Colombia," in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, ed. G. M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo Donato. Salvatore (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 333–68; Linda Farthing and Nicole Fabricant, "Open Veins Revisited: Charting the Social, Economic, and Political Contours of the New Extractivism in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 45, no. 5 (August 1, 2018): 4–17; Linda Farthing and Nicole Fabricant, "Open Veins Revisited: The New Extractivism in Latin America, Part 2," *Latin American Perspectives* 46, no. 2 (January 31, 2019): 4–9; Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*; and Fox, "Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity."

primarily along the lines of the challenges and opportunities that entailed its encounters with foreign peoples, both as consumers and as workers, both at home and abroad.

In many ways, the protagonists of chapter two and chapter three are Victor's recording experts as they embarked on transnational journeys to capture vernacular musics and myriad other sounding events on wax. Still, a host of local collaborators, translators, intermediaries, and performers loom also large in the picture. While chapter two focuses on the quotidian activities of the scouts over the course of the recording trips—especially pertaining to the way they navigated around multiple logistical, linguistic, aesthetic, and cultural issues—chapter three is devoted to the technical and material challenges they faced when setting up their itinerant recording laboratories, their experimentations with the various components of the recording equipment, and the peculiarities of their aurality. In addition to giving an overview of the more than twenty recording fieldtrips undertaken by the company to Latin America between 1903 and 1926, and of each one of the individuals Victor sent abroad, chapter two interrogates the extent to which the scouts' miscellaneous improvisations may register traces of a broader picture of improvisation in the international dealings of the recording industry. Taking on critically the question of how sound recordings were made during the acoustic era, chapter three also provides a characterization of recording processes in both stationary metropolitan studios and nomadic scenarios such as those of the expeditions.

Chapter four revolves around a particular set of recordings made during Victor's 1910 expedition to Mexico. On the onset of the outbreaks that inaugurated the Mexican Revolution, two scouts recorded the duet of Maximiliano Rosales &

Rafael Herrera Robinson, favorite entertainers in the local scene, performing "Casamiento de indios No. 1" and "Casamiento de indios No. 2" [Indian wedding, parts 1 and 2]. By examining this comic sketch in light of other creative products crafted by the phonograph and film industries, as well as of Mexican popular culture at the time, I analyze the sound production milieu of the acoustic era as the configuration of unprecedented experiences of auditory realism. Conceiving the instances of recording and reproduction of acoustic records as performative iterations—or dialectic soundings—the leading question in chapter four is "what happens when the recording happens?" Building on the ideas of Walter Benjamin, Diana Taylor, Victor Turner, Alejandro L. Madrid, and others, the answer to this question is manifold and brings together an array of issues surrounding the potential simultaneity of reproducibility and non-reproducibility as well as of indexicality and non-indexicality in relation to embodied cultural practices, popular culture, everyday life, and political resistance.

The fifth chapter recasts the recording expeditions as the intersection of dissimilar, seemingly contradictory, but in the end complimentary economic regimes and paradigms: the unbridled capitalism inherent to extractive economies, the figuration of a peculiar kind of economy of talent, the interplay of transculturation, and the social transactions of an economy of desire. And finally, in the epilogue, as I recall some of the issues raised in this introduction from the vantage point of the presentations and discussions advanced in each chapter, I close with some remarks about orientalism, the circulations of the recordings, and the centrality of dance in almost everything we have to say about sound.

A Note on Terminology

In the acoustic era, the individuals who managed the equipment when making the recordings were usually known across recording companies as "recording experts." For the sake of clarity, and to emphasize certain material undertakings, I sometimes use the term "recording technicians." Having in mind the traveling ventures of these recording experts and the way in which they regularly acted also as talent scouts, I have coined the term "recording scouts"—which I actually use more frequently than "recording experts" or "recording technicians." Similarly, I use the words "studio" and "laboratory" interchangeably, albeit the latter term was much more commonly used at the time.

Although "phonographs" and "gramophones" were technically different machines—the first referring to the device designed by Edison for the use of cylinders and the second to Berliner's machine for the reproduction of discs—both words were somewhat interchangeable in everyday language. Eventually, as disc-playing machines became the standard, both words became generic terms for record players. Yet, "phonograph" was much more frequently used in the United States and "gramophone" in the United Kingdom.[52] Throughout this text I use "phonograph" both as a generic term and to refer specifically to Edison's cylinder-based machine, while "gramophone" appears almost exclusively in relation to the activities of Emile Berliner or to establish a clear distinction between discs and cylinders. Nonetheless, more often than not, I make use of the less ambiguous expression "talking machine"—which for a time was a much more common

[52] Mark Katz, "Sound Recording. Introduction," in *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History of Early Phonograph, Cinema, and Radio* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), 14; See also Millard, *America on Record*; Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, 1877-1977*; and Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*.

expression in the trade—to account generically for phonographs, gramophones, graphophones, and other machines capable at the time of reproducing acoustic records.

1.

Imperial Entanglements: The Industrial Growth of the Victor Talking Machine Company in the Early Twentieth Century

As one of the recording experts of the Victor Talking Machine Company, Charles Althouse spent a good portion of his twenties traveling to various parts of the world. The recorded sound business was blossoming and almost any place on the planet offered both musics to be recorded and markets to be reached. Between 1912 and 1925, Althouse journeyed multiple times through several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Trinidad, Cuba, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador, setting up makeshift recording laboratories and scouting local talent to increase Victor's offer of vernacular music.[1] In 1915, he joined George Cheney for a recording expedition to China, Korea, and Japan that motivated a long article in the Spanish edition of *The Voice of the Victor*, the company's official trade journal. Featuring a series of photographs taken by Althouse himself and the experts' chronicle of their cultural impressions of those remote lands and peoples, the article celebrated the exceptionality of the recordings as well as the efforts made by Cheney and Althouse to complete their mission abroad.[2]

These recording experts—hereafter referred to also as "scouts" in light of their traveling adventures—had a hard time at the beginning trying to communicate

[1] "Charles Stanley Althouse," Recording Pioneers, accesed October 15, 2018, http://recordingpioneers.com/RP_ALTHOUSE1.html; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*, 48–53.
[2] Victor Talking Machine Company, "La Compañía Victor ha grabado un magnifico repertorio en el Lejano Oriente. Impresiones de viaje. Interesante coleccion de preciosas fotografias sacadas por nuestros peritos grabadores." *La Voz de la Victor. Organo de propaganda de la Victor Talking Machine Co. Camden, NJ, E.U. de A*. Tomo II. No. 2. Junio (1916), 15-18.

their “desires” to the Chinese performers, not only due to the language barrier but also because of the musicians’ unfamiliarity with the recording technology. Hence, the services of a Mr. Hsu were essential. Rather than being merely a translator, “he served with great enthusiasm as a mediator between the Chinese artists (…) and the technicians” helping also to bridge the gap between the stylistic features of their musical performances and the material possibilities of the equipment.[3] In Korea, the scouts were amazed by the ease with which their local assistants, in spite of their short height, were able to carry trunks as heavy as 135 kilos (about 300 pounds). Unapologetically, they describe them as “dwarfs.” By the same token of exoticism, the scouts accounted for the attires and other “peculiarities” of the Chinese theater—including the way in which men impersonated women—the surprisingly perfect English of the Korean translator, and even a cyclone that attacked the region during their stay.[4]

The specific challenges associated with the scouts’ journeys and their cross-cultural experiences overseas were an added value to the exotic commodity-record that the expeditions made possible. Entangled with a myriad of commercial and civilizing initiatives from the United States, the scouts’ labor became a marketing tool in itself, particularly akin to the imperial endeavors of the U.S. at the time, the colonial character of the recording industry, and the exotic gaze of its metropolitan audiences. Even if acting on behalf of a particular corporation like Victor, the activities of these recording scouts were a symptom of a broader urge to reach foreign markets. The narrative of their encounters with foreign peoples, musics, and climates helped nourished, along with other countless accounts in travel literature

[3] “La Compañía Victor ha grabado un magnifico repertorio,” 15-16.
[4] “La Compañía Victor ha grabado un magnifico repertorio,” 16-18.

and science, the commercial imagination of U.S. entrepreneurs as well as a renovated sense of a *manifest destiny* —now in the pursuit of the global expansion of consumer culture.

In this chapter, I study the imperial growth of the Victor Talking Machine Company vis-à-vis the imperial expansion of the United States in the early twentieth century. Following the research of Mathew Jacobson, Victoria de Grazia, Micol Seigel, Julian Go, and other historians about the development of the U.S. empire and the growth of its economic, political, and cultural influence worldwide, I incorporate into the analysis the role of the recording industry in general and of the Victor company in particular.[5] Likewise, building on the pioneering work of Pekka Gronow and Richard Spottswood, as well as on the recent contributions by William H. Kenney, David Suisman, Karl H. Miller, and Michael Denning in relation to the international dimension of the recording industry, I offer a new perspective about the global relevance of recorded sound during the acoustic era (before 1925).[6] While the transnational dynamics of the music business have been hardly considered by cultural historians dealing with the U.S. empire, music and sound studies scholars still need to pay more attention to the broader scenario that informed the global consolidation of musical entertainment as an area of business during the first decades of the twentieth century. It is my aim to contribute toward filling in those gaps.

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[5] See: Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*; De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*; Go, *Patterns of Empire*; Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism*; Joseph, LeGrand, and Salvatore, *Close Encounters of Empire*; Kaplan and Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism*; Kagan, *The Imperial Moment*; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

[6] See: Gronow, "The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium"; Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*; Richard K. Spottswood, *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893 to 1942* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, c1990.); Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*; Miller, "Talking Machine World"; Denning, *Noise Uprising*.

By focusing on the growth of Victor in the United States and its engagement with consumers, markets, and musics abroad, this chapter examines, on the one hand, the emergence and consolidation of "foreign" and "ethnic" records as marketing categories in the early music industry, and on the other, the industrial scenario that informed and propelled the international expansion of the company. Hence, this chapter sets the scene for the consideration of the various aspects associated with Victor's recording expeditions across Latin America, which will be the focus of the following chapters. The construction of Victor's factory in New Jersey and, more broadly, the way in which the company grew during the first two decades of the twentieth century, offer a first point of entry into the consideration of how Victor continuously adapted and improvised its way in the sound recording business. The expeditions will offer us with other instances to examine the improvisatory dynamics that shaped not only the Victor company but the music industry on the whole.

This chapter is organized in four sections. It starts with a brief excursion to the late nineteenth century to explore how a business was born out of Edison's invention, to examine the origins of the Victor company, and to foreground that the emerging consumer culture that saved the day for the commodification of the phonograph also propelled and sustained the imperial expansions of both Victor and the United States. The imperial entanglements—and parallels—between the political and entrepreneurial realms are the subject of the second section. Then, the focus turns to the industrial operations of Victor in Camden, the construction of its immense factory, and the relation of those projects with the company's engagement with "foreign" and "ethnic" repertoires. Finally, a brief coda, meant to anticipate the issues to which the remaining chapters will be devoted.

Making a Business Out of Sound Recording

When Spencer Tracy impersonated Thomas Alva Edison in the 1940's motion picture *Edison, the Man*, it was not only his own interpretation of the inventor's quirks which was expected to be convincing. The scene when the tinfoil phonograph finally works demanded a cluster of secondary actors grouped around Tracy, mainly Edison's employees, to enhance the emotional transcendence of the moment. Their faces and bodily expressions turn from disbelief at the beginning of the experiment to complete amazement when Edison's words are eventually played back through the horn. While looking repeatedly at each other in perplexity many times in a few seconds, these men are supposed to recreate what could have been like for the original witnesses to behold the dawn of the sound recording era. In the movie, as soon as the efficacy of the new device has been proved, one of the overexcited employees says, "That's a wonderful invention." Edison thoughtfully replies, "It's no invention, but they're waiting for us all the time." Almost interrupting his employer, another worker inquires, "You mean, it was an accident?" to which Edison responds calmly, after a brief pause, "No, no. I don't think it was an accident." Instead of extending the scene into an elaboration of Edison's intriguing answer or his employees' first impressions with the device, the movie cuts abruptly into the depiction of a newsboy on the street shouting as loud as he can: "Edison invents talking machine! Read all about the machine that talks!"[7]

[7] Clarence Brown, dir. *Edison, the Man* (MGM, 1940). See: David Shedden, "Today in Media History: Before Digital Recording There Was Edison and His 1877 Phonograph," November 21, 2014, http://www.poynter.org/news/mediawire/283603/today-in-media-history-before-digital-recording-there-was-edison-and-his-1877-phonograph/; Randall Stross, "The Making of America: Thomas Edison - TIME," *Time*, accessed December 9, 2014, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1999143_1999210_1999211,00.html.

The transition from the scene in Edison's laboratory to the newsboy as well as the cinematic transition from the phonograph episode to the invention of the light bulb, takes for granted a smooth incorporation of the phonograph into people's everyday life. By focusing solely on Edison's personal circumstances—as several histories of the phonograph do—the movie does not recreate what it took for the invention to gain social and cultural currency. Why would it, anyway? That's left for us to inquire. I believe that the cultural legitimization of recorded sound was driven primarily by its constitution as a profitable area of business, and more critically, by its assimilation in the form of a wide range of commodities in the burgeoning scenario of modern consumer culture at the turn of the twentieth century. As Jonathan Sterne has argued, the practical applications and social configurations of sound reproduction technologies were more aligned with the habitus of emerging middle-classes than with the original intentions of their inventors. In fact, for the most part Edison failed to anticipate or interpret properly the implications of his technical achievement. Perhaps more than anything else, Victorian attitudes (first) and the capitalist culture of consumption (later) shaped the cultural contours of the phonograph, its figuration in society, the patterns of its commercialization, and the multiple technological transformations associated with the machine through the 1920s.[8]

In 1878, the year after his first successful experiments, Edison boasted that, out of all of his inventions, "none has commanded such profound and earnest attention throughout the civilized world as has the phonograph," noting also that countless possibilities could be derived from the application of its "foundation

[8] See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, c1984), 1–6, 170–93; Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 191–214.

principle, namely, the gathering up and retaining of sounds hitherto fugitive, and their reproduction at will."[9] Although Edison was mostly right in his appreciation of the phonograph's potential, such vision did not translate, at first, into a successful business model. Edison originally suggested at least ten possible applications for the new machine, including letter dictation, books for the blind, recordings of family reminiscences, musical reproduction, and the preservation of languages.[10] By virtue of the gimmickry and exceptionality of the phonograph, Edison's initial approach was to exploit audiences' curiosity through public shows performed by traveling agents. Soon enough, however, both the novelty of the show and Edison's dedication to the phonograph waned. The inventor devoted himself to the electric bulb and the phonograph was practically forgotten for almost a decade. In 1886, Chichester Bell and Charles Tainter entered the sound recording business with the development of the "graphophone." Infuriated, Edison returned to his sounding ventures and came up with an "improved" phonograph. This resulted in a legal warfare for patent issues. Edison accused Bell of plagiarizing his model and Bell blamed Edison for copying his improvement of using wax cylinders instead of tinfoil. The conflict was resolved with the intervention of Jesse H. Lippincott, a businessman who bought the phonograph rights of both companies and unified the talking-machine industry under a single monopoly—The North American Phonograph Company. Nevertheless, Lippincott failed, due in part, to the

[9] Thomas A. Edison, "The Phonograph and Its Future," *North American Review* 126 (1878): 530.
[10] It would be compelling to discuss which may have been the reasons (or desires) behind Edison's ideas about these practical applications for the phonograph—instead of merely reiterating how unsuitable or unviable those ideas were in the end. For one thing, I believe that rather than pointing to what the phonograph could do, Edison was—consciously or unconsciously—attesting to what it should do. In that vein, the historical narrative of the phonograph, at least in its first few years, would not be so much about the limitless possibilities it entailed but more about its conception as a disciplining technology, and of sound recording on the whole as a domesticated and domesticating tool in light of bourgeois or Victorian ideals or aspirations—particularly in matters of family structures, memories preservations, literacy, and even vocalities and language normativity.

unsuitability of the telephone-business system of assigning territorial rights for the commercialization and distribution of phonographs. In other words, renting, instead of selling phonographs turned out to be a bad idea. Moreover, both Lippincott and Edison proved themselves unsuccessful with their insistence of promoting the phonograph as a dictating aid in the office. Not only did they have to face the opposition and sabotage of human stenographers, but their machines became increasingly unpopular in a shrinking market of operations.[11]

Louis Glass was the manager of the Pacific Phonograph Company in San Francisco—part of the chain of territorial assignments developed by Lippincott. By 1889, as the story goes, when the industry was stubbornly focused on dictating machines, Glass developed "an ingenious mechanism that automatically opened and closed an electrical circuit between the storage battery and the motor of an Edison phonograph"; instead of the horn, he installed various sets of listening tubes, so that a nickel was needed to activate the mechanism and additional nickels to open each set of tubes.[12] Glass set up the first coin-operated phonographs on November 23, 1889, and, by May 14, 1890, he reported an income of over $1,000 in nickels. As amusement centers with coin-operated mechanical devices (player pianos, film machines, etc.) were springing up rapidly throughout the United States at the time, these adapted phonographs became, in the course of a few years, an appealing business alternative and an increasingly popular form of entertainment. Even the Edison company would eventually set up its own fancy phonograph parlors with many coin-operated phonographs.[13] These

[11] Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 30–57; See: Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 72.
[12] Schicke, *Revolution in Sound*, 25–26.
[13] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 25–27.

nickel-driven machines along with the domestic recordings made by their owners were, apparently, the first signs in the reconfiguration of the recording industry toward becoming, primarily, a provider of recorded sound for entertainment purposes.

In spite of Edison's initial lack of enthusiasm for recording music, commercial ventures were already under way by 1890. Yet, as only one fraction of the total spectrum of timbres could be captured by the recording horn, the earliest recordings consisted almost exclusively of brass bands; the pieces had to be adapted to the 2 or 3 minutes permitted by the cylinders; and in view of the lack of an effective duplicating system, artists had to repeat the same pieces as many times as copies were needed. It was also common, for instance, to place ten or so phonographs around a brass band in order to obtain multiple recordings of the same performance; an announcer would record the name of the piece in each phonograph before the song, and the members of the band would be ready either to cut the piece shorter if they were running out of time, or to record applauses at the end if more space was left in the cylinders. By merit of these procedures, after three or four hours, as many as three hundred cylinders of the same selection could be produced. This, of course, at the expense of exhausted musicians or the artistry of indefatigable performers like George Johnson, who was credited for laughing with the same amusement in the fifty-sixth recording of "The Laughing Song" on a single day.[14]

Through most of the 1890s the phonograph was sold as a device that allowed both the recording and reproduction of wax cylinders. However, with the development of Emile Berliner's reproduction-only gramophone for discs and the

[14] Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 47–48; Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*, 13–14.

increasing significance of recording contents for companies' profitability, the music industry came to be defined by a split between the production and the consumption of music. Recorded discs were not particularly appealing to the buying public at the beginning, but by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century they had become the most ubiquitous merchandise of the early recording industry. The commercial activities of the Victor Talking Machine Company, established in 1901 under an irreversible allegiance to gramophones and discs, were crucial in the process. As David Suisman shows, Berliner's model "introduced a structural and social division between making a recording and listening to it"; with Edison's phonograph, "access to one assumed access to the other as well; sound recording was something people could *do*," but as discs loomed larger as the standard vehicles of recorded music across recording companies and talking machine manufacturers, sound recording came to be more and more only "something people could *listen to*."[15] Along with this rationale, the quality of the recordings also became a priority. It was not only that people did not have the means to make their own recordings, but that the companies began to develop more sophisticated standards for capturing sound that, little by little, rendered a result practically impossible to achieve in a domestic setting. That is the dawn of the professional recording studio.[16]

Berliner developed his disc gramophone in 1887. Nonetheless, as he lacked a robust financial backbone, his business remained mostly local in the Washington

[15] Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 5–6. Mark Katz explains: "At first, the term 'gramophone' specifically referred to a disc-playing machine as distinct from the cylinder-player phonograph. Later, after disc machines became standard, the terms became more or less interchangeable, generally referring to record players." (Katz, "Sound Recording. Introduction," in Timothy D. Taylor, Mark Katz, and Tony Grajeda, eds., *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History of Early Phonograph, Cinema, and Radio* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), 14.)

[16] Chapter 3 of this dissertation is devoted to the technical procedures for acoustic recording, both in permanent recording laboratories and in fieldtrip settings, before 1925.

D.C. area. Thus, the competition for most of the 1890s remained between the American Graphophone Company (eventually Columbia) and Edison's North American Phonograph Company. Berliner's United States Gramophone Company was a marginal player in the game for almost a decade. Nonetheless, since 1896, following an alliance with Eldridge R. Johnson, manufacturer and distributor of an improved gramophone, and Frank Seaman, an experienced manager and advertiser, Berliner's gramophone became a strong competitor for Edison and Columbia. But more for the latter company, as Edison went out of business for a few years due to the bankruptcy of his first phonograph company.

Although the graphophone and the gramophone were technically different machines—one used wax cylinders and the other discs—intense battles ensued between both companies for patent infringement. It was unlikely that the Graphophone Company would prevail, but the most unexpected thing happened. By 1899 Seaman was not satisfied with his business deal with Berliner, so he declared himself—and by extension Berliner's company—guilty of infringement. Before this move, Seaman had created his own company based on the exploitation of Berliner's and Johnson's improved gramophone, which Seaman came to name the "zonophone," having made also an agreement under the table with the Graphophone Company. The first casualty of these machinations was, as expected, Berliner's business. Johnson was left with a lot of money invested in a vast stock of gramophones and records. In the middle of the crisis, Johnson found a way to make his gramophone records less noisy and to improve the quality of his device overall. Not being allowed to sell his merchandise due to the legal penalty against Berliner, he simply gave away many of the new improved records for free. Eventually, however, he began to sell them with increasing success. Seaman sued

him, but this time the court decided in favor of Johnson. Still, he was prohibited to use the name "gramophone" for his business, which led him to adopt "talking machine" (or simply "the Victor") instead. By the end of 1901, the Victor Talking Machine Company of Camden, NJ, had already taken off as a promising business—the seeds of a soon-to-be commercial empire of global proportions.[17]

With the setting of coin-in-the-slot phonographs and the recording of popular brass music, the industry gave way to a market particularly attuned to the cultural sensibilities of urban, working class people in the United States; a market in which recorded selections mirrored prevalent contents of popular culture. Although Edison and Victor privileged what they considered highbrow musical products, such as opera selections or popular music performed by "renowned" artists, massive doses of entertainment were also produced in a lowbrow aesthetic realm featuring known and unknown performers—flexible enough to adapt their art to the technical limitations and intricacies of the new medium. These records included not only military-band music, coon songs, and selections of minstrel and vaudeville shows, but storytellers, whistlers, and comedians. The tensions between highbrow and lowbrow products within the same realm of production can be appreciated, for example, in the case of Victor's Black Label of popular music—as opposed to its

[17] See: Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 58–68, 83–99; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*, 96–102; Schicke, *Revolution in Sound*, 44–70; Millard, *America on Record*, 42–57. In the middle of the court battles with Seaman, the business relation between Eldridge Johnson and Emile Berliner became also complicated, especially in light of patent issues. In the end, they opted for the combination of their patents under Johnson's new company. In relation to Johnson's decision to use the word "Victor" for his company, at least four different stories have been suggested. The most common one has to do with the legal battles involving Seaman and Berliner and out of which Johnson came out as the "victor." Another story points out Johnson's belief that his improved gramophone was a "victory" in both scientific and business terms. Other accounts refer that it could have derived from "Victoria," the wife of Leon Douglas, one of Johnson's original business associates, or even that Johnson imported the name from the "Victor" bicycle, a popular item at the time that he regarded as a remarkable design. See: Frederick O. Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America: Ninety Years of Communications Pioneering and Progress: Victor Talking Machine Company, Radio Corporation of America, General Electric Company* (Camden, N.J.: General Electric Co., 1991), 22–23.

luxurious Red Seal or Red Label of operatic renditions. The executives of the company usually referred to the catalogue of popular products, scornfully, as the "Coney Island stuff." Notwithstanding these prejudices, recorded popular music and entertainment proved to be a significantly profitable arena of business—often times much more so than highbrow materials; an arena of business represented by millions of records and that, in many ways, saved the day for the commercial exploitation of the phonograph between the 1890s and the 1910s.[18]

By marketing its talking machines as sophisticated musical instruments and its records in the Red Seal catalogue as exclusive content, Victor emphasized nineteenth-century Victorian ideals of domesticity. Although its engagement with popular culture in the U.S. and abroad was always a crucial (and growing) area of business, one of Victor's chief marketing strategies consisted of the promotion of its products within a rhetoric of social and domestic uplift. Few initiatives reflect such mentality as clearly as the release of the Victrola, from "Victor's viola," in 1906—a Victor talking machine enclosed in a luxurious wooden cabinet, designed to serve also as a piece of furniture in bourgeois parlors. By the same token, Victor's marketing pushed for the use of a different—read classier—terminology to refer, for instance, to the dealers ("merchants" rather than "distributors") or to the music ("library of selections" instead of "record collection"). Even when dealing with popular musics at home and abroad, Victor pursued, whenever possible, an aesthetic redefinition by means of the incorporation of vocal styles imported from operatic singing. In all this, the marketing of talking machines and records as

[18] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 41–43; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 101–24.

instruments of social uplift operated side by side with the insistence that the phonograph was indeed an educational and civilizing medium.[19]

The social reconfiguration of the phonograph, from the realm of popular entertainment to spheres of middle- and upper-class respectability, as pursued by Victor, resembles in a way Eldridge Johnson's own testimony of upward social mobility—from a young, poor, country boy to a millionaire. Indeed, a combination of innovative and conventional practices in business administration, coupled with an increasing demand for recorded musical entertainment and a particularly favorable environment for domestic and international trade, made Johnson's endeavors at Victor rather profitable. Along with a massive investment in advertisement and a careful control of patent rights, Victor executives capitalized on the application of Fordist principles of production efficiency and corporate management. Likewise, while paying the employees well helped improve the company's goodwill, it was also purposefully instrumental in preventing any sort of unionization.[20]

All things being equal, despite the relentless enforcement of capitalist modes of workforce exploitation, Victor succeeded in achieving loyalty to the brand from employees and consumers alike—an issue that we will discuss in detail in chapter five. Thus, alongside other businesses in the United States and Europe in the early twentieth century, the Victor Talking Machine Company played a key role in the consolidation of the recording industry within the modern landscape of capitalist entrepreneurship and massive consumption. By means of the

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[19] Victor Talking Machine Company, "The Victor Victrola," *The Voice of the Victor. The Trade Journal of the Victor Talking Machine Co.*, *Camden, NJ,* Vol. I, No. 4, September (1906), 3; Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 44–45; Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 56–79. See, for example, the collection of photographs featuring exemplary salesrooms as displays of bourgeois parlors in "Model Victor Salesrooms on America's Most Fashionable and Greatest Thoroughfare," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VII, No. 5, June (1912), 8–9.

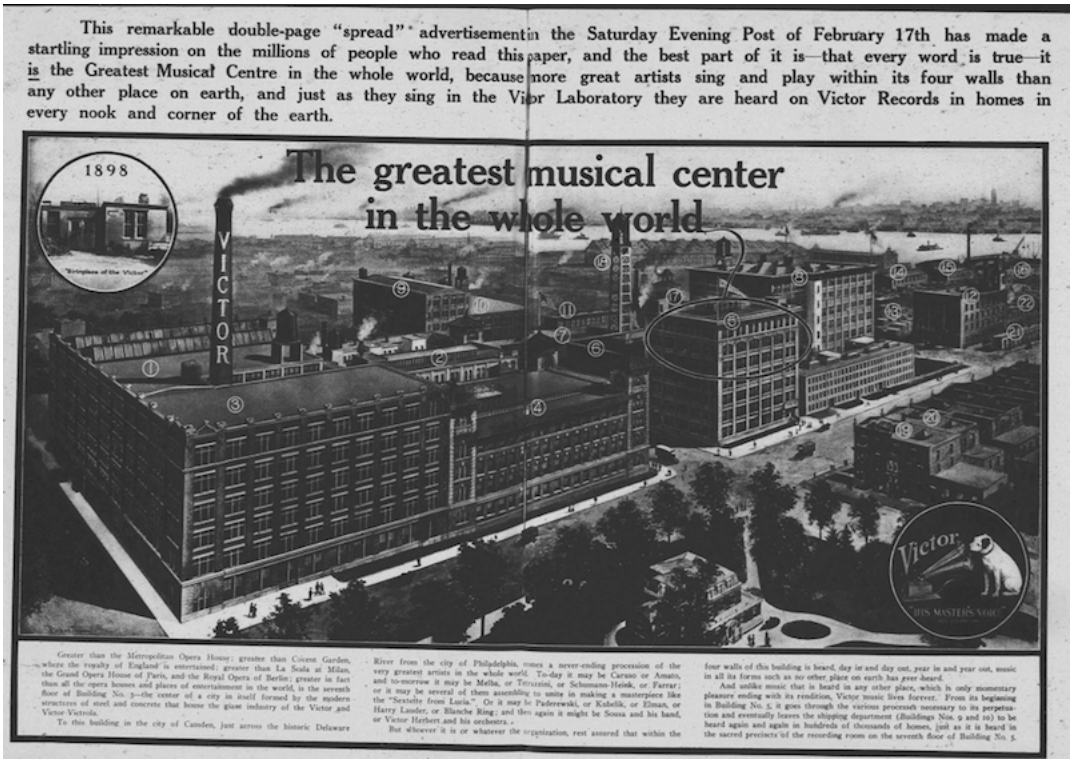
[20] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 46–64.

monopolization of the production side of phonography, Victor set in motion not only patterns of quick revenue but colonizing ventures worldwide, masked under the rubric of international trade. Raising technical recording standards, fetishizing the phonographic experience of consumers, limiting people's access to recording devices, and controlling the available contents through a fast-increasing offer of records catalogues were but a few of the strategies that helped strengthen the transnational, even if short-lived, dominion of its commercial empire. In tandem with the imperial ventures of the United States at the time, Victor's talking machines reached the remotest parts of the planet at the same time that the immateriality of musical sounds came to be reified in the voracity of capitalism.

Victor and The U.S. (Market) Empire

The March 1912 issue of *The Voice of the Victor* included a reproduction of a double-page Victor ad published the previous month in *The Saturday Evening Post* that, in the opinion of the company, had "made a startling impression on the millions of people who read this paper." With the title of "The greatest musical center of the whole world," the ad featured a drawing not of a concert hall—as the flamboyant title may have suggested on a first impression—but of Victor's mammoth factory in Camden (Figure 1). The depiction of Victor's 22-building emporium by the New Jersey coastline, spattered all around with industrial smoke, contrasted with the tiny illustration of the small 1898 workshop, "birthplace of the Victor," in one of the corners of the ad. Bragging about the "never-ending procession" of artists coming every day to make recordings at Victor's headquarters, the text of the ad insisted that the recording room—on the seventh floor of building five—was indeed greater than New York's Metropolitan Opera

House, London's Covent Garden, La Scala in Milan, the Royal Opera of Berlin, and the Grand Opera House in Paris. "[W]ithin the four walls of this building," the ad continued, "is heard, day in and day out, year in and year out, music in all its forms such as no other place on earth has ever heard. And unlike music that is heard in any other place, which is only momentary pleasure ending with its rendition, Victor music lives forever." The accompanying commentary about the ad in *The Voice of the Victor* enthusiastically observed "that every word is true," giving an additional appreciation about the international outreach of Victor's recorded music: "just as they sing in the Victor Laboratory they are heard on Victor Records in homes in every nook and corner of the earth."[21]


This remarkable double-page "spread" advertisement in the Saturday Evening Post of February 17th has made a startling impression on the millions of people who read this paper, and the best part of it is—that every word is true—it is the Greatest Musical Centre in the whole world, because more great artists sing and play within its four walls than any other place on earth, and just as they sing in the Victor Laboratory they are heard on Victor Records in homes in every nook and corner of the earth.

The greatest musical center in the whole world

1898

VICTOR

Victor

Figure 1: "The greatest musical center in the whole world,"
Victor ad, *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VII, No. 2, March (1912), 8–9.

[21] *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VII, No. 2, March (1912), 8–9.

Notwithstanding the hyperbolic estimation of its musical activities, Victor's business had certainly thrived since its origins in 1901. If anything was accurate in the ad, it was the implicit narrative of growth expressed in the comparison between Johnson's 1898 workplace, still under the tutelage of Berliner, and the massive industrial operation of the Camden plant by 1912. Not only the panorama of sales and profit was particularly promising, but the Victor brand was well established almost all over the world. Thus, there were a good number of reasons to be boastful. Interestingly enough, however, Victor's bragging had begun well before, practically since its inception, when there were not really many things to brag about. As early as in 1902, for example, when Victor was still a relatively unknown brand in the U.S., an ad in *The Cosmopolitan* announced "[a] new era in talking machines," claiming that "[t]he *Victor*, which already was far in advance of every other," was being "[s]old by more than ten thousands stores throughout the United States."[22] Similarly, in 1906, before sales figures had really taken off towards massive proportions, the company reported to its dealers: "The remarkable growth of the talking machine business as exemplified by the Victor Co., has been a wonder and 'eye opener' for everyone. The solidarity and permanency of the talking machine industry is now unquestioned." And it continued, now in biblical language, "[a]ll the world loves music, and upon this solid rock the business is sure to increase and prosper."[23] Eventually, the numbers would prove them right, and what at the beginning were but self-aggrandizing statements would turn out to be, in the short term, a fairly accurate characterization of the company's leading position within the music industry.

[22] *The Cosmopolitan,* Vol. 34, No. 2, December (1902).
[23] "Busy day and Night," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. I, No. 2, May (1906), 9.

In more than one way, the trajectory of the Victor Talking Machine Company during the first decade of the twentieth century resembles that of the United States imperial expansion since the 1820s. It is not only that the geographical and economic growth of the U.S.—from the provincialism of the 13 colonies to its global power after WWI—is comparable to Victor's corporate progress, but that the company's practices of self-aggrandizement seem to have followed the country's example. When president James Monroe issued the infamous "doctrine" that bears his name at the end of 1823, the proclamation was almost ludicrous in the international arena. In response to what U.S. leaders assumed as a potential reinstatement of the European empires in Latin America, and thus as a threat over their own ambitions with the region, the Monroe Doctrine established that "'any attempt' by the Europeans 'to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere' would appear as 'dangerous to our peace and safety' and as evidence of 'an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.'"[24] At the time, most European powers did not pay much attention to Monroe's warning and some leaders "disdained it as an arrogant gesture worthy of international contempt," considering that "the United States lacked the naval and military power to enforce it."[25] As far as Latin Americans were concerned, their interest in the doctrine vanished soon, and the doctrine itself went pretty much into oblivion for most of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine would eventually instigate and sustain the U.S. imperial endeavors and relentless interventionism in Latin America

[24] Mark T. Gilderhus, "The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 8; Robert H. Holden and Eric Zolov, *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11–14.
[25] Gilderhus, "The Monroe Doctrine," 8.

throughout the twentieth century.[26] Yet, it is not only about the analog trajectories of political and commercial entities.

Recording companies like Victor, Pathé, Gramophone, and Odeon created empires of their own in tandem with the configuration of a new imperial age fostered by the (neo)colonial enterprises of the United States, France, Britain, and Germany in various parts of the planet. By virtue of explicit and implicit alliances with their political counterparts, recording companies took advantage of imperial resources and networks while providing, at the same time, other networks and resources for the colonial agendas of modern nations. For that matter, Victor benefited from the imperial structures and spheres of economic and cultural influence of the United States. Correspondingly, while sending convoys of recording scouts to open new markets for the phonograph, Victor was also opening markets for U.S. goods in general. Latin America was indeed a fertile ground for the advancement of both the U.S. pursuit of hemispheric leadership and Victor's transnational quest for foreign markets. Furthermore, Victor's global expansion and the configuration of its commercial empire was informed and shaped by the novel scenario of mechanical modernity and labor production furthered by Taylorism and Fordism. As we shall see, few projects epitomized this era as clearly as the construction of Victor's colossal factory in Camden. The accelerated mechanization of the music industry responded to the unprecedented demand *for* and mass consumption *of* portable recorded music. The imperative demand for musical novelty mirrored the increasing demand for more copies of the same recordings

[26] Gilderhus, 8–16; Holden and Zolov, *Latin America and the United States*, 100–102; Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 59–90; Mark T. Gilderhus, *The Second Century: U.S.–Latin American Relations since 1889* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2000).

and the talking machines to reproduce them. In manifold ways, such "machine-ism" and the modern imperial configuration of the world in the early twentieth century are two sides of the same coin. In short, as this "machine-age imperialism" unfolded, to use Jeremy Lane's expression, so did the recorded music industry.[27]

The contours of the modern U.S. empire took shape between the 1870s and the 1910s, in light of the country's response to contemporary dynamics in economy and politics but also as a continuation of previous colonial ventures. The settlement of English puritans in North America in the seventeenth century and the westward expansion of the United States—with the concomitant annexation of territories formerly belonging to Mexico, France, or Spain—were propelled, maybe more than anything else, by the idea of the nation's manifest destiny alongside discourses about savagery, barbarism, and civilization.[28] The unprecedented phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century, the imperial age proper, was the extent of the operations and global outreach of the United States in industrial, commercial, and military terms—manifested in its colonial enterprises in the Caribbean, West Africa, South East Asia, and elsewhere, as well as by its increasing leadership in world trade. Similarly, although the history of the U.S. conquest of North American territories is by definition a history of encounters with "foreign" peoples within the country, the U.S. imperialist expansion between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century fostered renewed encounters with otherness, now on a global scale. Unlike the policies of erasure that drove the interactions with the native populations of North America, the modern engagement with foreign peoples—either as imported workforce or transoceanic consumers—was essential for the

[27] Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism*, 7–9.
[28] Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

imperial agenda of the United States. Indeed, such engagement was galvanized along economic, political, and cultural coordinates. Although profit opportunism was at the core of U.S. modern imperialism, it unfolded along heated discussions about how to deal with the massive influx of immigrants at home and about how to control the behavior—or guarantee the self-governance—of "barbarous" peoples abroad. Furthermore, it was not only about the widespread of manufactured goods or cultural models from North America. A crucial practice of the U.S. empire, as advocated by Teddy Roosevelt and others, was the appropriation of some of the "barbarian virtues" of these foreign peoples, that is, the capitalization on other contributions beyond their labor or their money.[29] As we will explore in chapter two, these virtues included not only their idealized pre-modern ways of living, valued as eventual antidotes against the evils of modernity, but their immaterial cultural capital, regarded as potential sources of exotic gratification. Music and talent would become, as we will discuss in chapter five, valuable and extractable feedstock—intangible currency throughout transnational imperial networks.

The growth of the imperial apparatus was manifold, but it was evident primarily in matters of overseas administration, military power, trade bureaucracy, and domestic labor. Unlike the westward expansion in the nineteenth century, the main purpose in the imperial age was not securing resources or solidifying the U.S map. As Mathew Jacobson points out, the rationale behind many of the international endeavors of the United States was to have a foothold toward something else. The lives and lands in Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Panama, Guam, and the Philippines were but "a stepping stone" into the consolidation of global

[29] Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 4–7, 179–219, 221–59; Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism*, 9–47.

dominance; notwithstanding their resources of various kinds, those lives and lands represented first and foremost an opportunity to increase the imperial infrastructure—in the form of "shipping lanes, naval bases, treaty ports, and coaling stations"—as well as the range of influence of the United States in the world.[30] In this light, the story of the U.S. empire is a tale of how an entanglement of economic, military, and cultural forces, shadowed by a thriving political entity, managed to impose on countless of people from all over the world the urge to orbit around it.[31] Orbiting here is not just a metaphor. As the dominance of the empire conquered almost "every nook and corner of the earth," as Victor also bragged about the outreach of its records, it became nearly impossible to escape its influence, its norms, its hegemony. It was certainly a different kind of empire, much unlike any other empire of the past, but not necessarily less ruthless or ambitious. As much as it was, sometimes more than others, an empire of flesh and blood, it was inevitably an empire of the senses and that, in the long run, would secure its dominion and its legacy.[32]

As shown by Victoria de Grazia, rather than demarcating a clear division between the political and commercial realms, Woodrow Wilson insisted that "salesmanship and statesmanship were 'interrelated in outlook and scope.'"[33] Entangled with his rhetoric of peacemaking in light of the international spectacle of

[30] Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 7, 234–59.
[31] Jacobson, 8.
[32] Julian Go has convincingly argued that the dynamics of the U.S. empire are no necessarily different from those of other imperial entities, particularly, the British Empire. In doing so, he has challenged the idea of the uniqueness of the U.S. empire, somewhat pervasive—explicitly and implicitly—in many cultural and diplomatic histories. See, for example: Go, *Patterns of Empire*, 206–34. Although I agree with Go's argument, and even expand on it in chapter two to account for the extractive economy advanced by Victor in Latin America, I still consider that there are some unique features of the U.S. empire, especially in relation to the unprecedented phenomenon of mass media consumption on a global scale in the early twentieth century.
[33] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 1–2.

the Great War, there was also an economic agenda of standardization as another underlying force to propel U.S. commercial imperialism. Bringing people together into a single way of living and, by extension, into homogeneous patterns of consumption was, in Wilson's view, an efficient way to avoid conflict. In other words, world peace was about overcoming not only ideological but also taste barriers. While compelling his audience of salesmen to "go out and sell the goods that will make the world more comfortable and more happy [*sic*], and convert them to the principles of America," Wilson was indeed pushing for "a global traffic in values as well as commodities."[34] Thus, quite aptly, De Grazia refers to the seemingly frontier-less expansion of the U.S. economic dominance in the early twentieth century as a "market empire." She writes,

> Its most distant perimeters would be marked by the insatiable ambitions of its leading corporations for global markets, the ever vaster sales territories charted by state agencies and private enterprise, the far-flung influence of its business networks, the coin of recognition of its ubiquitous brands, and the intimate familiarity with the American way of life that all of these engendered in peoples around the world.[35]

The impetus of this empire was, unmistakably, the consumer culture that had been shaping lives and quotidian practices both in the United States and abroad. It ruled primarily by means of the false sensation of peace and fulfillment that projected the acquisition of goods manufactured in the U.S. and that was reinforced by a flood of advertisements in various formats. Its rule was backed, whenever needed, by military force, but the main enemy of the U.S. market empire was commercial competition. For this matter, its success depended on the effective challenge of Europe's monopoly of international trade; the imperial dispute, then, was not only

[34] De Grazia, 2–3.
[35] De Grazia, 3.

for local markets across the planet but also for the predominance of specific ideas about cultural hierarchies and social distinction. Put another way, in the novel battlefield of massive consumption, the United States strove for grounding the values of modernity not anymore on the basis of the European bourgeoisie but on that of U.S. consumer culture.[36] Such dynamics were evident in the international trade of many commodities, from vacuum cleaners and cars to cigarettes and phonographs—albeit there were some exceptions. For example, as I have discussed elsewhere, the marketing of U.S.-made player-pianos in Latin America entailed, at its core, a competition against European instrument makers. Nonetheless, North American entrepreneurs in the player-pianos business capitalized on the European cultural capital of piano performance rather than on new symbolic referents of musical respectability—even while celebrating U.S. mechanical ingenuity all along.[37]

As much as the United States followed suit in the long-time colonial practices of European powers, it developed new models of colonialism and imperialism. In more than one way, the U.S. empire in general and its market empire in particular constituted rather unique (or at least unprecedented) transnational formations. The notion of "empire," de Grazia also establishes,

> is usually taken to mean a formal system of hierarchical political relationships in which the most powerful state exercises decisive influence. In its classic Western form, an empire has more or less well-defined territorial boundaries. The capital of the metropolis is likely also to be the center of the empire. It exercises its power largely through political authority delegated to subordinate states or to colonial authorities. It establishes political monopolies over trade and resources." [However, f]or most of its history, the American empire did not

[36] De Grazia, 3–5.
[37] Sergio Ospina Romero, "Ghosts in the Machine and Other Tales around a 'Marvelous Invention.' Player-Pianos in Latin America in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1–42.

> act along these lines. If anything, it offered a model of informal empire, with its outright colonial adventures aberrant, circumscribed, generally short-lived.[38]

By virtue of its imperial ventures, the United States managed to turn consumerism into global influence, and in doing so, it bypassed nations' sovereignty over their public and cultural spaces. Sometimes, this influence entailed yardstick interventions such as those captained by Teddy Roosevelt and most of his successors. More often than not, however, the commercial invasion of the U.S. market empire operated on subtle mechanisms meant to marshal people and governments to comply with the U.S. way of doing things. From the dollar diplomacy to marketing strategies that fostered "loyalty" to U.S. corporate brands, the imperial power was nurtured more by implicit and explicit norms of "best practices" than by the imposition and enforcement of official laws. Although the military and bureaucratic apparatus of the empire was never stagnant, the effectiveness of its rule—especially in the marketplace—relied on micro structures of power relations everywhere, embedded, as Michel Foucault would put it, "in the whole network of the social."[39] Trapped in fantasies of free choice and social democracy—conceived as the banners of consumer culture—foreign peoples around the planet were in the end governed by an empire without being fully aware of it.

Wilson's ideas about bringing the realms of politics and commerce together were much more than a vignette in his speech. To be sure, U.S. entrepreneurs inclined to international trade were stalwartly backed up by the government—much

[38] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 6.
[39] De Grazia, 6–9; Gilderhus, *The Second Century*, 20–33, 46–65; Ninkovich, "The New Empire"; Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion and Robert. Hurley (New York: New Press, 2000), 345; see: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 94–97.

more so than any other government at the time, including the United Kingdom. "By World War I," de Grazia writes, "no peacetime government was doing more to promote its export economy than the federal bureaucracy in Washington, D.C."[40] Some of the initiatives in that front included exceptional tax breaks for income made overseas and the 1919 Webb-Pomerene Act, which freed businesses involved in international trade from the U.S. antitrust law. By far, the most supportive government agency to the efforts of exporting consumer culture was the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (BFDC), established in 1912, but particularly powerful in the 1920s under Herbert Hoover's tenure as secretary of commerce. Congress increased the budget of the BFDC by millions and, by the time Hoover became president, what originally was a 100-staff office had turned into a government agency with 2,500 employees.[41] Although I do not have evidence yet of the extent to which Victor may have benefited from the BFDC, the company certainly had useful connections in D.C. and participated with other businesses in lobbying practices to get what they needed from the U.S. Congress. In 1911, for instance, *The Voice of the Victor* featured the visit of Lewis N. Clement, President of the National Association of Piano Dealers, to the Camden plant. Clement was on his way to Washington D.C. "to meet with the Committee of the 100 in support of the efforts to have Congress, through a ship subsidy and other legislation, help in the establishment of a merchant marine worthy of our present standing among nations."[42]

[40] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 213.
[41] De Grazia, 213.
[42] "Clement a Visitor at Victor Factories," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VI, No. 1, January–February (1911), 3. Other lobbying instances pushed particularly hard by Victor included its opposition to the Oldfield Bill, an initiative that, apparently, intended to regulate (read decrease) the prices of talking machine merchandise on the basis of pursuing a "square deal." Between 1912 and 1913, the company reported constantly about it, urging dealers and consumers alike to press their representatives to vote

For the United States, engaging in international trade was not really optional. By the end of the nineteenth century, as Jacobson points out, the overproduction of industrialized goods came to surpass the capacity of domestic consumption. Being at the verge of a saturated market at home, it became the more essential to find consumers elsewhere. Thus, just as foreign immigrants were crucial auxiliary workers in the U.S., peoples abroad came to be coveted as auxiliary consumers. In all this, a conveniently fashioned rhetoric of civilization was pervasive: being civilized and modern meant being a consumer of industrialized goods, so that part of the mission of the United States as a civilizing entity was to create the need—or the want—for its manufactured goods and their consumption. Conversely, sustaining such a civilizing role across the board of diverse "barbarous" societies entailed the strategic administration of their consumption habits as well as the controlled saturation of their own markets. In spite of the waves of depression and poverty that attacked the U.S. at various moments between the 1870s and the 1910s, the export figures were increasingly impressive.[43] Moreover, as the rhetoric of overproduction and market saturation amidst renewed narratives of manifest destiny in the form of exporting goods was constantly reinforced by a host of politicians, economic experts, cultural brokers, and advocates of various kinds, industrial corporations in the United States were

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against it. Even Eldridge Johnson himself wrote a column on the matter. About the coverage of the Oldfield Bill, see: *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VII, No. 8, September (1912), 7; Vol. VII, No. 10, November (1912), 12–13; Vol. VII, No. 11, December (1912), 5, 8–9, 11 (with a cartoon about the Bill); Vol. VIII, No. 1, January (1913), 8–9; Vol. VIII, No. 2, February (1913), 10–11 (Victor's letter to Oldfield); Vol. VIII, No. 5, May (1913), 4; Vol. VIII, No. 10, October (1913), 3; and a special supplement on the matter in Vol. VIII, No. 12, December (1913).

[43] Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 13–20. Jacobson points out that "before 1876, there were only fourteen years in which the nation's exports exceeded its imports; between 1876 and the 1970s, there were only *three* years (1888, 1889, and 1893) in which they *did not*." The growth in exports between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century was particularly significant: "from $526 million in 1876 to over $1 billion per year by the late 1890s; exports continued to climb steadily, reaching $2 billion for the first time in 1911, and jumping to $5, $6, and $7 billion per year during the war years of 1916–19" (Jacobson, 20).

surrounded by a particularly stimulating business environment that pushed their operations overseas.[44] International trade was, in short, almost the natural course of action. Along with the managers of many other companies in manifold business areas, those of Edison, Columbia, and especially Victor, did not hold second thoughts when they had the opportunity to reach customers and consumers around the globe.

An Empire of Foreign and Ethnic Records

The Victor Talking Machine Company was allegedly the biggest corporation of the world in the sound recording business during the early twentieth century—along with its European affiliate, the Gramophone Co. In 1914 alone, for instance, while the total output manufacture value of the recording industry in the United States was estimated at $27 million, $16 million of those corresponded to Victor and only $4 million to Edison.[45] Except for a few complicated years in the 1920s, Victor's sales growth was almost exponential during the acoustic era. From $500 in 1901 it jumped to $3 million in 1904, and $12 million in 1905, with a significant increase over the years also in terms of the actual dividends paid to the private stock holders: 6% between 1902 and 1911, 20% in 1912 and 1913, 35% and 30% in 1914 and 1915 respectively, a big leap to 80% in 1916, and after a small dropout to 20% in 1918—surely because of WWI—payments reached 50% again in 1919. By 1911, Victor had already sold 47 million records—Enrico Caruso having been the first of its "exclusive" artists in reaching the mark of 1 million records as early as

[44] Jacobson, 21–24.
[45] Millard, *America on Record*, 65. Millard gathers this information from the U.S. Department of Commerce 1914 census of manufactures, as summarized in *Talking Machine World* 17 (15 June 1921): 105. However, the article in TMN does not discriminate between companies so it is not clear where Millard obtained this information from. I emailed Millard asking him about it, but he replied saying that he had already discarded his research notes and materials for that book. I may need to consult the census.

1904. More than 147 million records and 3 million talking machines were sold between 1912 and 1919, and following some minor setbacks in the early 1920s, Victor sold nearly one million reproducing devices and 167 million records during the ortophonic period of 1925–1929. In 1929, when the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) bought the Victor Talking Machine Company, the cumulative sales of almost three decades reached about $413 million in "instruments," or talking machines and $272 million in records—from a total production of around 8 million machines and 600 million records—plus $15 million in assorted parts such as needles, horns, motors, and sound boxes. The business that Johnson started in 1901 with a capital of $50,000 eventually became an emporium worth approximately $700,000,000 by the end of the 1920s.[46]

The massive growth of Victor's factory in New Jersey epitomizes, maybe better than anything else, the evolution of the company. In the course of roughly a decade, between 1900 and 1911, Victor expanded from a small machine shop into a 22-building factory that covered almost an entire neighborhood by the waterfront of Camden.[47] By purchasing adjacent properties and unremittingly constructing and refashioning more floors and buildings, the company assembled one of the biggest plants in the East Coast at the time. In 1907, the company reported that it had reached 217,300 square feet of floor space (5 acres), which represented about half of their entire construction project: 400,310 square feet (10 acres).[48] By 1918,

[46] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 29, 46, 90, 104, 116, 124; See: David Suisman, "The Sound of Money: Music, Machines, and Markets, 1890-1925" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2002), 137, 192–93; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 101–24; Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures. How Technology and Marketing Revolutionized Desire*, 164.
[47] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 36.
[48] "The Growth of the Victor Factory," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. II, No. 1, January (1907), 2–4. The reports about the state of the construction, new factory extensions and new building projects were somewhat frequent in *The Voice of the Victor* since 1907 and through the 1910s, and usually included

however, Victor's headquarters comprised almost two million square feet of factory space, and one decade later it had added half a million more (about 60 acres), reaching a total of 31 buildings throughout nearly ten blocks of the city. Exterior bridges and underground tunnels connected different buildings and facilitated internal operations, while the company's own railroad system, the harbor, and paved roads all around were crucial for the dynamic transportation of materials, commodities, and personnel. The coal storage area was big enough to keep a year's supply, the water tanks could hold up to 220,000 gallons—although the water use every day accounted for millions of gallons—the sawdust waste could easily amount to fifteen tons in a regular day, and the lumber yard was regarded at some point as the largest in the world dealing with African mahogany and other kinds of woods. Besides its luxurious offices, a state-of-the-art auditorium, recording laboratories, and the record and Victrola manufacturing facilities, Victor had its own hospital, its own restaurant, and its own printing plant in the same multi-building complex dominated by the famous Nipper Tower. From the 44 employees who posed for a group photo in front of Johnson's shop in 1900, the company grew to 4,000 in 1912, and to 10,000 by 1929, of whom at least 30 executives ended up being millionaires.[49]

Efficiency and productivity was the motto. In the spring of 1912, in light of the "increasing demand" for talking machines and records, the company assured its dealers across English-speaking territories: "Every employee [is] continually and

several photographs of the plant and the construction, some of which even made it to the cover of the journal.

[49] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 36, 49, 50, 52, 63–64, 68–70, 75–76, 84, 103, 124; Millard, *America on Record*, 52.

everlastingly on his job (…) every wheel in our factory is turning overtime."[50] Still, while some industrial procedures were carried through hastily at the speed of the machines—including recording sessions themselves—some manufacturing standards, such as the making of the wooden cabinets of the Victrolas, resisted automation. Besides the occasional "assistance from the best outside furniture manufacturers," the company announced the expansion of the "cabinet factory to more than double its present capacity," along with the construction of a new plant just for "mixing and grinding" the various materials needed for making the records, with which the factory's capacity to prepare such compound would be quadrupled.[51] To convey the message of the grandiosity of Victor's industrial production even clearer, the writer of the report stated: "All any Dealer has to do to convince himself of the enormous increase of our output is to compare the quantity of goods he is receiving this year with what he received twelve months ago, and then multiply the resulting difference by about 10,000, which will give some kind of an idea of what we are doing."[52]

Seven months later, the company boasted one more time that while "capacity doubled, demand tripled," all of which made it for "an era of Victor prosperity that promises to again double in the next twelve months."[53] And in January 1913, the company's trade journal published an eloquent cartoon showing a supply-and-demand scale; in the cartoon, even though a man keeps putting building after building on the "supply" side—labeled as "New Record Factory," "New Cabinet Factory," etc.—the "demand" side remains heavier with an obese child

[50] "The Victor Factory Rushed to the Very Limit of its Great Capacity," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VII, No. 3, April (1912), 2.
[51] "The Victor Factory Rushed to the Very Limit," 2–3.
[52] "The Victor Factory Rushed to the Very Limit," 2.
[53] "Why Our Increased Factory Facilities are Unequal to the Occasion, *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VII, No. 10, November (1912), 4–5.

sitting on it, getting heavier just by drinking bottles of advertisement (Figure 2). The message was clear: the corporation could not be doing better.[54]

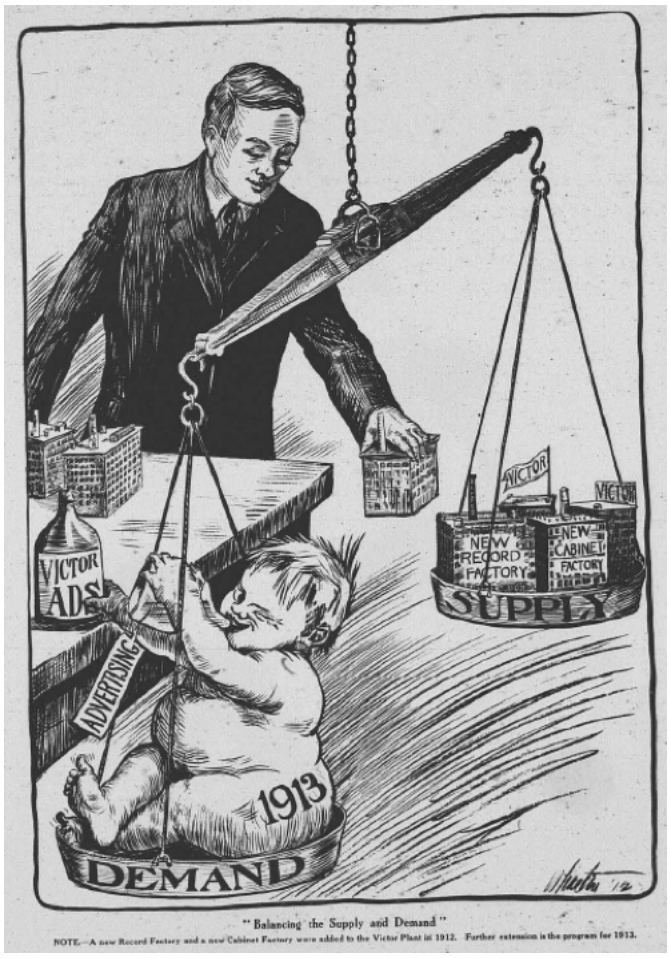

Figure 2: Ad published in *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, January (1913), 11

These waves of increasing demand and productivity explain the eventual humongous dimensions of the factory far beyond the original plans. Victor's executives certainly envisioned from the outset a big business, but maybe not that big. Yet, although the extent of the industrial operations and the outreach of the company may have exceeded their expectations, they managed to adapt and

[54] *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, January (1913), 11. In June 1913, the company reported "Factory Capacity Oversold." As the business panorama of the first semester of 1913 had significantly exceeded that of the second semester of 1912—including "an unusually large holiday trade"—it was necessary to suspend the establishment of new dealers. See: *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VIII, No. 6, June (1913), 3.

reorient their plans according to newer and newer circumstances. For that matter, the construction of the factory was, in a way, another instance of improvisation in the evolution of the Victor company, just as the Latin American recording expeditions in particular and the early music industry in general—as it is discussed in chapter two. But the expanded capacity of Victor's plant in Camden also played a key (and direct) role in the imperial maneuvers of the United States at the time. During WWI, Victor had to move for a while into the production of warfare items, most significantly airplane wings. In 1918, as 1,200 of the 9,000 employees had been drafted to the war front in Europe, Victor's recording experts had to leave temporarily their recording laboratories in building 15 in order to join the rest of the workers in the making of plane wings, and even some recording artists engaged in campaigns selling war bonds. Following the war, both the industrial production of phonographic merchandise and the expansion of the factory resumed, although the massive investments in the latter of these endeavors came to an indefinite halt, interestingly, around the same time the acoustic era itself came to an end.[55]

The precepts of the U.S. market empire were certainly observed in Victor's plant in Camden just as in Henry Ford's headquarters in Detroit. The principles of Taylorism, somewhat picked up and refashioned by Ford, were also crucial for the massive growth of Victor's operations in the U.S. and abroad, especially after 1906. Although there are no surviving references about the extent of Eldridge Johnson's knowledge and direct engagement with these ideas, the production of records and Victrolas at the Camden factory was undoubtedly based on labor division and specialization, the standardization and interchangeability of parts, the efficient relation between low manufacturing costs and affordable merchandise, and a

[55] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 84–92.

carefully designed assembly line. As a matter of fact, the growth of the plant in Camden, in the form of the continuous addition of new buildings in the same neighborhood, seemed to have followed, primarily, a pattern toward more efficiency in the management of such assembly line. The production of Victrolas in particular—from their manufacture and assembly to their shipping—resembled in many ways the streamlined processes of the car industry. In fact, some of the exterior bridges that connected different buildings were meant to facilitate the operations between the different departments involved in the manufacturing of Victrolas. As Fred Barnum explains, these included, in sequence, the wood-carving division—that by 1924 included more than 125 wood carvers—the metal manufacturing and motor installment section, and the packing and shipping departments, with a variety of conveyors, elevators, boxcars, and switch engines all along the way.[56]

As important as the factories of Victor, Ford, and other companies were for the industrial growth of the United States, the imperial hegemony was not really forged in Camden nor in Detroit. It was in the global arena; more distinctly, in the competition against European businesses over local markets almost everywhere—Europe included.[57] From Latin America to the Philippines, U.S. corporations took the lead in many commercial fronts by means of the subtle but effective imposition of consumerist culture and the sustainability of consumerist patterns of U.S. goods.

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[56] Barnum, 76–77, 107. It is still a matter of debate the extent of Ford's actual engagement with the principles of Scientific Management advanced by Taylor. On the relationship between Taylorism and Fordism, see for example: Karel Williams, Colin Haslam, and John Williams, "Ford versus 'Fordism': The Beginning of Mass Production?," *Work, Employment and Society* 6, no. 4 (December 1992): 517–28; Peter F. Drucker, "Knowledge-Worker Productivity: The Biggest Challenge," *California Management Review* 41, no. 2 (1999): 80–82. Considering that the big incursion of Ford's assembly line is credited to have taken place since 1909, with the introduction of his Model T, it is interesting to note that Victor may have anticipated Ford in the application of the ideas of "the assembly line" with its massive production of Victrolas since 1906.

[57] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 209–16.

Victor, among them, managed to expand the "fordist" model of its assembly line into the efficient marketing and distribution of its products at home and abroad.

As mentioned above, pursuing foreign markets was presented as a strategy to prevent the saturation of the domestic market in the U.S. Yet, international trade was almost in full swing before such saturation had become a serious issue. There were many different reasons for engaging with consumers and workers abroad—that is, for either or both exporting goods *to* and establishing manufacturing plants *in* foreign countries. Competition with rival businesses in the United States was a crucial one, just as the irresistible seduction of those seemingly virgin markets and the prospect to increase sales and profits. The truth is, however, that many businesses tried and just a handful succeeded—Victor among them.[58] The move was a risky one, but the economic growth of the company in the U.S. provided a good indicator of the potential outcome overseas. And the prognosis was accurate. The commercial empire of the Victor Talking Machine Company through the 1920s was indeed a profitable one. "Although exports never made up more than 6 percent of Victor's total sales," as David Suisman establishes, "this still comprised many millions of records and phonographs. (Or, to put it differently, this relatively low percentage says more about the enormous market in the United States than about the insignificance of the market abroad.)"[59]

In the end, it was a win-win scenario, even more so as many of the records produced and sold abroad would also become good sellers in the U.S. Yet, it was not only about sales. There were other reasons, more practical, in terms of

[58] De Grazia, 209–10. On the competition of sound recording companies in the U.S., and the extent to which such competition may have encouraged their expansion abroad, see: Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*.
[59] Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 270.

production. Recording artists and setting plants abroad helped lower manufacturing costs. Not only labor was much cheaper—and even free sometimes in the case of the musicians recorded during the Latin American expeditions—but taxes and tariffs were easily circumvented. Furthermore, even though the sound recording business was too young to be reaching a point of domestic saturation in the U.S., there were many other companies offering similar products and trying to get hold of the same consumers. And the same was true, in a way, about emerging businesses overseas. Having local factories in Argentina and Brazil, for instance, was almost a necessity for Victor in light of the increasing competition it was facing from local entrepreneurs like Max Glücksmann in Buenos Aires or Frederico Figner in Rio de Janeiro.[60] As reaching out was almost organic to the empire, the accommodation to or the surrendering of the tastes and markets of their various places, peoples, and musics it encountered along the way was a crucial factor in the agenda. As a parallel narrative with the dimensions of the plant and the favorable balances of the accounting books, the Victor Talking Machine Company produced records in more than 40 different languages during the acoustic era.[61] Still, international trade and the configuration of a commercial empire of global proportions entailed more than a huge factory and the engagement with multiple languages.

The world was a site of cultural difference but the phonograph was adaptable to the musical taste of any community. The massive immigration of foreign individuals to the United States and the encounter with foreign peoples in the course of imperial entanglements abroad were decisive factors in shaping the

[60] Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*, 30–46; Humberto M. Franceschi, *A Casa Edison e seu tempo* ([Rio de Janeiro, Brazil]: PETROBRAS, 2002).
[61] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 124.

commercial endeavors of recording companies around a myriad of new repertoires. Indeed, as another symptom of the imperial imagination shared by U.S. politicians and businessmen alike, recording companies attempted to make a clear distinction between *foreign* and *ethnic* records. Whereas foreign records were conceived as selections of international highbrow artists performing either classical or popular music in a seemingly operatic style, ethnic records were regarded as traditional and popular musics from various parts of the world.[62] For Victor and Columbia, the term "ethnic" became soon a label for the musics of groups that had a language and/or a culture different from that of the mainstream U.S. society, and made the distinction clearer by assigning different numerical series in their records catalogues.[63] By the same token, Richard Spottswood has characterized ethnic music as "the music of cultural minorities."[64] However, the boundaries between the "foreign" and "ethnic" categories were often times transgressed, erased, and reinvented. First, in light of the diverse musical soundscape that recording companies found in the U.S. and abroad, and then, by virtue of the global circulation of these recordings and their unforeseen consumption in a variety of scenarios and places.

"The 'foreign-speaking population,' as the companies called it, was a market that had to be taken into consideration," Pekka Gronow writes. Early on, he continues, U.S. companies began to record "immigrant artists, and in fact, their activities at home and abroad complemented each other. Recordings made in Europe and Asia could also be sold to members of the same groups in the United States, just as recordings made by immigrant artists in New York could be exported

[62] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 69.
[63] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 12.
[64] Richard Spottswood, "Commercial Ethnic Recordings," in *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, ed. American Folklife Center, Studies in American Folklife, no. 1 (Washington: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 1982), 51; see: Spottswood, *Ethnic Music on Records*, c1990.

to their home countries."[65] During the first half of the twentieth century, Victor, Columbia, Edison, and a few other recording companies issued more than 30,000 titles aimed to non-English communities in the U.S. and elsewhere—a half of which were produced by Victor. Being part of the wide "foreign" and "ethnic" labeling matrix, these recordings were not unified or distinguished by genre, so that they included, somewhat indiscriminately, traditional, popular, and classical musics.[66] Interestingly, some vernacular musics, once they became part of the productive wheel of the recording industry, moved from the popular mainstream to the ethnic category (cf. Irish-American music), while others, like Hawaiian music and eventually Cuban music, ran in the opposite direction—making the term "ethnic" to lose most of its original connotations.[67]

These records could hardly compete in sales with the mainstream popular products of the industry, and yet Victor and Columbia kept recording these musics consistently for various reasons. First, although artists like Enrico Caruso, John Philip Sousa, or eventually Paul Whiteman sold a million records relatively easy, most ethnic recordings reached at least the 2,000-mark, and that was not an appalling outcome for the business anyway. By the 1920s it was estimated that selling as little as 1,200 copies still left a good margin of profit, and there were ethnic recordings that sold as many as 100,000 copies. Foreign and ethnic records did not sell by the millions, but it was also true that some conventional popular recordings ended up selling "poorly," so that, in the end, it was all part of the same business venture.[68] Moreover, the production of ethnic recordings helped the plants

[65] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 5.
[66] Gronow, 1, 12.
[67] Gronow, 14–16.
[68] Gronow, 3, 12.

keep running and they served to promote both the phonograph and other recordings among immigrant communities in the United States—just as they were meant for foreign populations abroad. This was particularly the case with "ethnic" European music. Some of the records included by U.S. companies in their foreign series had been originally recorded by local affiliates in Europe that had sent their masters to the U.S. to have their discs pressed in Victor's factory. According to Gronow, "[s]ince the recording expenses had already been covered in the country of origin, the cost of issuing such recordings was actually small."[69] Once again, it was a win-win scenario. Not only did Victor inflate its catalogs aimed at the increasing number of European immigrants in the United States, but considering the substantial influx of European immigrants in countries like Argentina, Victor's catalogs offered an impressive collection of appealing recordings and helped sustain the company's monopoly for a good number of years. On top of this, Victor spared no efforts in sending troops of recording scouts abroad, or in marshaling foreign touring artists passing through the U.S. to its recording horns in New Jersey and New York.

As most of the immigrants came to Europe, Victor pursued significant doses of European popular repertoires to supply the domestic market of foreign records. Conversely, Latin American musics seemed to have been catered, at least at the beginning, mostly to audiences in Latin America, with the idea that by providing recordings of local musics it would be easier to open those markets for the phonograph and for other Victor records. That was, as we will consider in detail in

[69] Gronow, 21. According to Spottswood, by the 1940s, the commercial operations around ethnic musics proper had become significantly "dormant" within the music industry, and it had been taken over in a way by stylized (or "Americanized") versions of international musics. "By World War II," he writes, "this homogenized music was nearly all that was left." Victor and Columbia kept their ethnic products in the catalogues for a while longer, but by 1952 they "quietly bowed out of the ethnic recording business." (Spottswood, "Commercial Ethnic Recordings," 64.)

the following chapter, a crucial rationale for setting and sustaining recording expeditions throughout Latin America between 1903 and 1926. Still, there was a considerable contingent of Latin Americans and Hispanics in the U.S. to which those recordings were also made available—and not only to them, since many of these records would eventually gain significant traction amidst many other communities in North America. It is true that the vast majority of immigrants came from Europe; yet, between 1906 and 1915, partly due to the Mexican Revolution, about 127,000 Mexicans moved to the U.S., making out about a fifth of the immigrant population from all over the Americas.[70] The influx of Latin American immigrants to the United States, regardless of how small in comparison with that of European émigrés, not only was a matter of consideration for the eventual distribution Latin American recordings in the U.S., but it also complicated the porous boundaries between the "foreign" and "ethnic" labels. Let's consider for a moment the way in which Victor dealt with its domestic clientele for foreign and ethnic records.

Besides its industrial apparatus for the marketing, advertisement, and distribution of the products manufactured at the Camden plant, Victor had a special team of traveling agents who went across the U.S. bridging the gap between the company and its numerous dealers nationwide. Known as "The Victor Traveling Department," it was a selected group of nearly thirty men whose mission was "to help dealers improve sales techniques and increase their volume."[71] Already in 1906, the company had been sending "Salesmanship Lessons" to dealers all over

[70] See: U.S. Department of Commerce, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, vol. I (Washington D.C., 1913), 781–82; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, vol. II (Washington D.C., 1922), 687–94; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 64; Juan Ramon García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).
[71] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 79, 110.

the U.S. under the flag of a "Victor College."[72] But it was in the fall of 1913 that the "Traveling Men" initiative was launched. Displaying a double-page U.S. map covered with the faces of each member of the "traveling force," the company exhorted its dealers with these words: "They do not cover the country merely to take orders, but to co-operate with the Dealer—to assist every Dealer in their respective territories to develop more and better business. The Victor traveling man is a representative of the Victor company, and the extent to which you co-operate *with him* will be the measure of the benefits you derive from his labors in your locality."[73] Having been trained extensively in the marketing principles of the company, these men were expected to irradiate Victor's strategic plans while surveilling the dealer's compliance with Victor's regulations and, in doing so, to help preserve and expand its commercial dominions across the nation.[74] It was somewhat of a common practice for Victor to suspend—or expose publicly—local dealers who violated Victor's stipulations, such as making orders for private use rather than for the sake of dealership, misusing the company's trademark, or engaging in misleading advertisement (i.e., offering reduced prices not authorized by the company). These practices of surveillance, as another symptom of Victor's imperial mindset, were explicit from the onset: "Special representatives of The Victor Company are scouring the country, ferreting out unworthy and illegitimate dealers selling Victor's goods, who are a source of annoyance to bona fide Victor Dealers."[75]

In all this, the rhetoric of teaching and learning was pervasive. On top of the

[72] "'Victor College' Reopens," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. I, No. 4, September (1906), 1.
[73] "Victor Traveling Men Cover the United States from Coast to Coast and From Border to Border," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VIII, No. 9, September (1913), 10-11
[74] Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 190–91.
[75] "List of Suspended Dealers," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. I, No. 5, November (1906), 12. See also: Vol. I, No. 3, July (1906), 1; and Vol. VII, No. 8, September (1912), 8-9.

recurrent articles in *The Voice of the Victor* meant to educate dealers in the art of salesmanship, Victor established in 1919 a sales institute at Camden, that came to be known as "the Red Seal School." It offered a free, two-week program for the training of dealers and distributors in matters of sales management and store administration—a program in which even dealers from South America got to participate.[76] Indeed, a crucial component of all these educating endeavors was to make sure that local dealers cared for and took advantage of the musical preferences of their foreign clientele—an issue William Kenney, David Suisman, and others have also written about.[77] In May 1906, a Victor dealer from San Francisco compelled his fellow merchants to "[s]tudy to become a record salesman," that is, to become acquainted with the music in the records—paying as much attention to "the sweet pathetic tone which Arthur Pryor gets on the trombone," as "to the peculiar and exact rhythm of the Spanish records."[78] Another dealer, from Cincinnati, celebrated the popularity of Victor products and the way in which talking machines salesrooms were sites for the gathering of people from various ways of life, social classes, and ethnicities: "Young and old are there. One has arrived in his automobile, the other carries his dinner pail and is soiled from the workshop. The swell from the suburb, the substantial middleman, and the Hebrew from the Jewish quarter. Even John, the Chinaman, is there to inquire if there is anything new in his particular line. It is a place where the richest man in town and the poorest rub elbows every day."[79]

The same dynamics that propelled U.S. goods abroad drew millions of

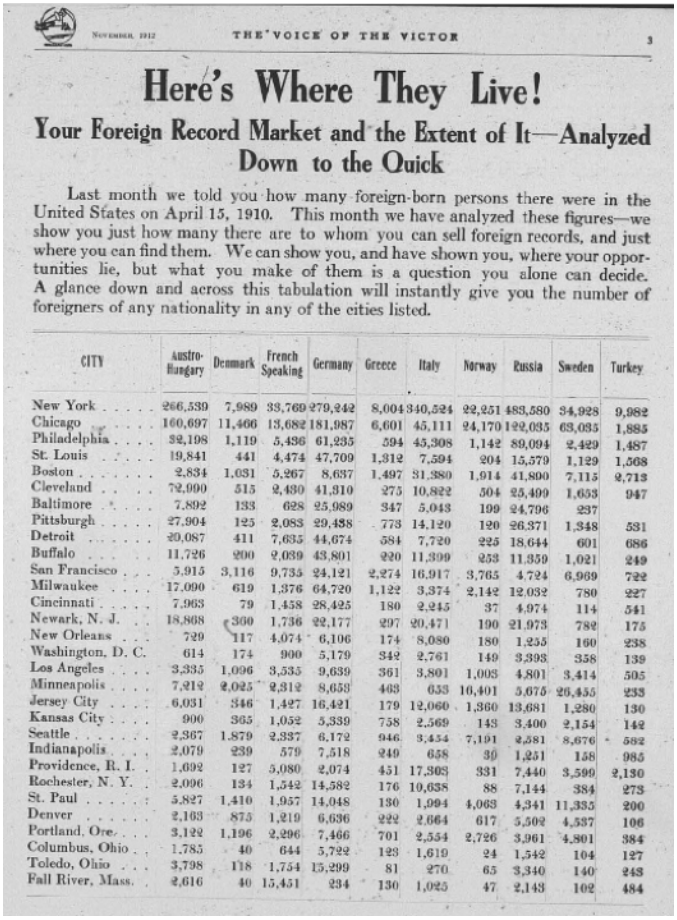
[76] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 110. See: "Un moderno establecimiento Victor en Valparaíso," *The Voice of the Victor. Edición Española*, Tomo XI, No. 1, March (1922), 10-12.
[77] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 65–87; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 180–91.
[78] "Study to Become a Record Salesman," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. I, No. 2, May (1906), 6.
[79] "The Secret of Its Power," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. I, No. 2, May (1906), 9.

peoples to North America—almost in a fashion of exporting commodities and importing people. About 26 million immigrants came to the United States between 1870 and 1920.[80] According to Kenney, "[i]n 1900, 13.5% of the population of the US was foreign born. (...) In 1910, 700 foreign-language daily newspapers with a combined circulation of 5 million catered to immigrant readers. The record companies estimated that nonnative speakers of English amounted to about one-third of the total market for phonograph products."[81] If by the 1870s almost half of American workers were farmers, by the 1910s about two thirds were industrial workers.[82] As Matthew Jacobson explains, the mainstream U.S. society perceived immigrants through the stereotyping lenses of social evolution; that is, as backward, inferior, barbarous, and uncivilized. But also, they were regarded as somewhat suspicious considering that they were wage-earners whose consuming habits were, at least at the beginning, starkly different from those of most U.S. Americans. Briefly put, successful assimilation implied compliance with consumerist habits. Therefore, not being a consumer was equivalent with not being civilized enough and hence, the immigrants' partaking in the U.S. society were believed to pose an additional hurdle to the economic threat of overproduction: underconsumption.[83]

In November 1912, Victor published a "tabulation" with the number of foreign individuals from ten different nationalities—most of them European—in thirty cities of the United States. With the title "Here's Where They Live!"—but tacitly

[80] Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 60–61.
[81] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 67.
[82] Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 64–67. Jacobson also shows that there was usually an evident division by ethnicity in terms of place and/or the labor expectations, by virtue of which, for example, while Europeans predominated in the big factories of the Midwest and the East Coast, most Mexicans came to Texas to work in the smelter industry.
[83] Jacobson, 73–85.

admonishing, “Go and find them!”—the data in the table was preceded by the following admonition: “we have analyzed these figures—we show you just how many there are to whom you can sell foreign records, and just where you can find them. We can show you, and have shown you, where your opportunities lie, but what you make of them is a question you alone can decide.”[84] (Figure 3).



NOVEMBER, 1912 THE VOICE OF THE VICTOR 3

Here's Where They Live!

Your Foreign Record Market and the Extent of It—Analyzed Down to the Quick

Last month we told you how many foreign-born persons there were in the United States on April 15, 1910. This month we have analyzed these figures—we show you just how many there are to whom you can sell foreign records, and just where you can find them. We can show you, and have shown you, where your opportunities lie, but what you make of them is a question you alone can decide. A glance down and across this tabulation will instantly give you the number of foreigners of any nationality in any of the cities listed.

CITY	Austro-Hungary	Denmark	French Speaking	Germany	Greece	Italy	Norway	Russia	Sweden	Turkey
New York	266,539	7,989	33,769	279,242	8,004	340,524	22,251	483,580	34,928	9,982
Chicago	160,697	11,466	13,682	181,987	6,601	45,111	24,170	122,035	63,035	1,885
Philadelphia	32,198	1,119	5,436	61,235	594	45,308	1,142	89,094	2,429	1,487
St. Louis	19,841	441	4,474	47,709	1,312	7,594	204	15,579	1,129	1,568
Boston	2,834	1,031	5,267	8,637	1,497	31,380	1,914	41,890	7,115	2,713
Cleveland	72,990	515	2,430	41,310	275	10,822	504	25,490	1,653	947
Baltimore	7,892	133	628	25,989	347	5,043	199	24,796	237	
Pittsburgh	27,904	125	2,083	29,488	773	14,120	120	26,371	1,348	531
Detroit	20,087	411	7,635	44,674	584	7,720	225	18,644	601	686
Buffalo	11,726	200	2,039	43,801	220	11,399	253	11,359	1,021	249
San Francisco	5,915	3,116	9,735	24,121	2,274	16,917	3,765	4,724	6,969	722
Milwaukee	17,090	619	1,376	64,720	1,122	3,374	2,142	12,032	780	227
Cincinnati	7,963	79	1,458	28,425	180	2,245	37	4,974	114	541
Newark, N. J.	18,868	360	1,736	22,177	297	20,471	190	21,973	782	175
New Orleans	729	117	4,074	6,106	174	8,080	180	1,255	160	238
Washington, D. C.	614	174	900	5,179	342	2,761	149	3,393	358	139
Los Angeles	3,335	1,096	3,535	9,639	361	3,801	1,003	4,801	3,414	505
Minneapolis	7,212	2,025	2,312	8,658	463	653	16,401	5,675	26,455	253
Jersey City	6,031	346	1,427	16,421	179	12,060	1,360	13,681	1,280	130
Kansas City	900	365	1,052	5,339	758	2,569	143	3,400	2,154	142
Seattle	2,367	1,879	2,337	6,172	946	3,454	7,191	2,581	8,676	582
Indianapolis	2,079	239	579	7,518	249	658	30	1,251	158	985
Providence, R. I.	1,692	127	5,080	2,074	451	17,303	331	7,440	3,599	2,130
Rochester, N. Y.	2,096	134	1,542	14,582	176	10,638	88	7,144	384	273
St. Paul	5,827	1,416	1,957	14,048	130	1,994	4,063	4,341	11,335	200
Denver	2,163	875	1,219	6,636	222	2,664	617	5,502	4,537	106
Portland, Ore.	3,122	1,196	2,296	7,466	701	2,554	2,726	3,961	4,801	384
Columbus, Ohio	1,785	40	644	5,722	123	1,619	24	1,542	104	127
Toledo, Ohio	3,798	118	1,754	15,299	81	270	65	3,340	140	243
Fall River, Mass.	2,616	40	15,451	234	130	1,025	47	2,143	102	484

Figure 3: Published in *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VII, No. 10, November (1912), 3.

Notwithstanding the apparent distinction between “foreign” and “ethnic” records in light of prevailing notions of highbrow/lowbrow registers and musical respectability, as posed by Kenney, there was seemingly another, more practical distinction from

[84] “Here’s Where They Live! Your Foreign Record Market and the Extent of It—Analyzed Down to the Quick,” *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VII, No. 10, November (1912), 3.

the standpoint of records production. While many of the "foreign" recordings came from Europe—having been produced mainly by the Gramophone Co.—most of the recordings made by Victor as a result of its incursions throughout Latin America ended up being labeled as "ethnic." Nonetheless, as discussed above, more often than not, the foreign and ethnic categories were not mutually exclusive, especially when it came to their distribution and consumption in a multiplicity of contexts, many of them particularly diverse on their own in terms of nationalities, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, and aesthetic preferences.

Recording companies insisted, as much as they could, in discriminating their clientele according to what Kenney calls a "synthetic definition of 'ethnicity'," that is, one based primarily on language and stereotypical cultural depictions. However, by virtue of economical and more practical considerations, such discrimination morphed frequently into an offer of phonograph products featuring diverse cultural realms amidst an equally diverse customer base. Thus, "Polish records by Warsaw's leading artists were intended for sale to 'those who love fine music as well as to those who understand Polish'."[85] The imperial engines of both the United States and of transnational corporations like Victor were fueled by the incessant incorporation of foreign peoples, their markets, their resources, their music, and certainly their money. At the end of 1912, for instance, the company enticed its dealer readership with these calculations: "The million and more immigrants who arrived in this country last year brought with them more than $46,000,000, an average of more than $38 per capita, which is something more than the per capita apportionment of money among the present population. If the average of brawn and perseverance were to be taken as well, their chances of success would be

[85] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 69.

likely to show quite the equal of that of the average man, and their purchasing power is a thing to be considered."[86] Notwithstanding how prosperous Victor's commercial operations seemed to be in the United States, it was still but a segment of the imperial outreach of the company. The ventures overseas added many others.

Coda: An Empire Abroad

In 1907, Colonel Robert M. Thompson made arrangements for a private trip around the world in the steamship "Mineola," an 8,000-ton vessel chartered especially for the occasion. Besides multiple technical improvements, the ship was furnished with "fifteen staterooms (…) decorated in the styles of Louis XV and George III periods" and a 100-feet-long ballroom equipped with a Victor auxetophone—a unique kind of phonograph technologically designed to reproduce records much louder than any other talking machine.[87] Although Victor was invested, almost from the beginning, in an agenda of international expansion, its talking machines and records circulated also widely far beyond the control or intentions of the company. Colonel Thompson's trip was but one of many involuntary flows of Victor merchandise, but along with the company's deliberate actions towards world trade, such circulations played a crucial role in the expansion of the transnational frontiers of Victor's own market empire.

One of the earliest and most efficient of the voluntary moves was Victor's agreement with its European associate in England: The Gramophone Company. Since 1902, by virtue of this cooperation, not only the records produced by each

[86] *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. VII, No. 10, November (1912), 16.
[87] "Around the World with a Victor Auxetophone," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. II, No. 6, November (1907), 8. For more information on the "auxetophone" see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

company could be commercialized (or reissued) by its transatlantic partner, but the two companies divided their areas of operations worldwide. While Victor was given the prerogative over the Americas, China, and Japan, the rest of the world—primarily Europe, Africa, and the other part of Asia—was for the Gramophone Co. Victor and Gramophone had the right (and responsibility) of representing each other's interests and artists in their respective territories, and that is part of the reason why Victor only sent recording expeditions to Latin America and East Asia and not to other parts of the world. Still, although the relationship between both companies was reciprocal in multiple levels—including their mutual cooperation in terms of equipment and recording expertise—it was not necessarily a leveled field of power dynamics, as Victor eventually owned over 50% of the Gramophone Co.[88] As a matter of fact, while sharing with the readers of its trade journal the great appreciation for its talking machines in the royal circles of England, Spain, Italy, Egypt, and Persia, Victor made it clear that "Gramophone is the name under which the Victor is known in Europe."[89]

Early in the day, record companies expanded internationally. In 1878, right after having filed the patent for his newest invention, Thomas A. Edison established the Edison Speaking Phonograph Company to publicize his machine through

[88] Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*, 11–31; Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 5; Gronow, "The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium," 56; Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 111. On the Gramophone Company, see also: Geoffrey Jones, "The Gramophone Company: An Anglo-American Multinational, 1898-1931," *The Business History Review* 59, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 76–100; Stephen Peter Martland, "Business History of the Gramophone Company Ltd: 1897-1918" (Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.16035; Peter Martland, *Recording History: The British Record Industry, 1888-1931* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2013). About the exchanges between Victor and Gramophone in terms of the technical matters associated with sound recording, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[89] "Royal Appreciation of the Gramophone," *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. IV, No. 1, January (1909), 5. Other interesting instances in which Victor reported about events or situations taking place in Europe involving its products—either directly or as represented by the Gramophone Co.— included a ceremony in Paris in which Victor records were buried in a time capsule to be open only after 100 years (*The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. III, No. 2, March (1908), 8) and the celebration of "A Parisian Victor Window Display," (Vol. III, No. 6, November (1908), 9.)

circus-like demonstrations "on a stage where enthralled crowds would hear voices recorded in various languages and even dogs barking."[90] By the late 1880s and early 1890s, these kinds of exhibitions had become somewhat frequent in various places around the world. Already in 1892, for example, public phonographic demonstrations were taking place in Santiago and Valparaiso, in Chile, including some selections of local popular music.[91] Edison began making deals with the Mexican government since 1890, and by 1907 the Edison company had established offices in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, and Sydney, besides the ones in New York and London.[92]

In 1905, Victor began to challenge Edison's monopoly in Mexico by arranging its own recording sessions in Mexico City and by invading the local market with its reproducing devices and records. For the following two decades, it expanded its operations to almost every country in Latin America, at the same time that its brochures, catalogs, and records—available in multiple languages—circulated widely across the Americas and throughout the world via either Victor's direct administration of certain marketing territories, the representation of the Gramophone Co., or simply by means of their unpredictable dissemination through everything and everywhere. By the early 1920s, Victor had invested millions in satellite offices, factories, and businesses in England, Canada, Argentina, Mexico, and the West Coast of the U.S.[93]

Michael Denning has recently depicted the recording business as something

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[90] Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures. How Technology and Marketing Revolutionized Desire*, 134–35.
[91] González Rodríguez and Rolle, *Historia Social de La Música Popular En Chile, 1890-1950*, 90.
[92] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 4; Jaddiel Díaz Frene, "A las palabras ya no se las lleva el viento: apuntes para una historia cultural del fonógrafo en México (1876-1924)," *Historia Mexicana* 66, no. 1 (July 1, 2016): 257–63.
[93] Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 111.

marginal during the acoustic era.[94] Nevertheless, the fact is that it was indeed a blossoming industry of increasing proportions, and that it was precisely the intensity of its global outreach before 1925 which made possible the post-1925 recording boom. Let's consider briefly some numbers from the data available. While nearly 3 million records were sold in 1900, close to 140 million—equivalent to $106 million—were sold in 1921. As early as in 1907, India imported 600,000 records, and a little later, when a local factory was established, the annual production capacity increased to 1 million. Argentina imported 880,000 records in 1909, 1,750,000 in 1910, and 2,690,000 in 1913, and most European countries imported between 100,000 and 200,000 records annually on average through the 1910s. In Russia alone, record sales reached to 20 million copies in 1915. Whereas the Gramophone Co. issued 200,000 titles between 1898 and 1921, current reconstructions of Victor discographies during the acoustic period have long past the 100,000 recordings. In terms of the production of phonographs and other talking machines, the numbers went from 345,000 in 1909, to 514,000 in 1914, and to 2,230,000 in 1919. Between 1914 and 1919, the manufacture value of phonographic products grew from $27 million to almost $160 million—an increase of over 500%. Through most of the 1920s, in spite of the competition with radio, the industry kept growing. U.S. companies sold about 100 million records annually, with record sales in most countries of the world ranging between 100,000 and 1 million per year.[95] However, this growth is not only about numbers but about the imperial outreach of recording companies in pursuit of vernacular sounds as well as the

[94] Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 67–68, 86–87.
[95] Gronow, "The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium"; Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*, 30–31. *Talking Machine World* 17 (15 June 1921): 105; *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, UC Santa Barbara Library: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php

extent to which phonograph culture, as an unprecedented social phenomenon, grew and gained currency around the world in the early twentieth century. The following chapters are devoted to these matters—interpreted in light of the more than twenty recording expeditions that the Victor Talking Machine Company of Camden, New Jersey, deployed throughout Latin America in the era of the acoustic phonograph.

2.

Recording Technicians on Tour: Traces of Improvisation and Other Issues around the Expeditions of the Victor Talking Machine Company through Latin America

"Everybody is familiar with the name of Jack London, novelist and magazine writer (…) probably the most realistic writer of the day." These words opened a 1908 special report published by the Victor Talking Machine Company about London's recent voyage "around the world," in which the writer made himself "popular with semi-civilized tribes by means of the Victor."[1] London had sailed with his wife—and the "conspicuous" phonograph manufactured by Victor—aboard the "Snark," a schooner turned into a relaxing cruising vessel. While touring in search of stories to nourish his writings with, the report continued, London continuously took solace in recorded music and took advantage of the potential of his talking machine to amaze the peoples he encountered along the way:

> Mr. London delights in penetrating the wilds and getting close to nature, and whether in camp, cabin or on board ship, he and the Victor are inseparable companions. (…) [He] finds it useful in facilitating his intercourse with the natives of the semi-civilized countries. It has a charm that they are unable to resist, and although they seem awed when hearing it for the first time, this feeling soon gives way to interest and admiration.[2]

[1] "Jack London's Cruise Around the World with the Victor," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. III, No. 3, May (1908), 4.

[2] "Jack London's Cruise," 4. The article included a letter from London's wife to the Victor company, in which she expressed: "The Victor is a joy. We simply revel in it and keep it going from early morn[ing] to late at night—with a rest now and then, of course. You are doing great things. I wished we could hear 'Die Meistersinger' and the Sextette from 'Lucia,' with the big singers."

Indeed, to enhance the exoticizing effect of this description, the article included photographs of “inhabitants of Taiohae, Nuka-hiva, [and] Marquesas Islands,” one of which showed “four stalwart natives squatting on the ground listening to the Victor.” (Figure 4). Via the phonograph, as the report argued, Jack London did not only manage “to make friends with some of the most obscure aborigines of the South Islands,” but to give “to the world a number of interesting accounts of peoples whose manners and customs have never before been accurately described.” But the indigenous peoples did not simply listen to the machine and London did not merely write about them. Another photograph depicted a group “going through their native hula-hula dance to the tune of a popular two-step.” (Figure 5).

Figure 4: “South Sea Islanders,” photograph published in *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. III, No. 3, May (1908), 4.

Figure 5: "Native Hula-Hula Dance to Victor Music," photograph published in *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. III, No. 3, May (1908), 4.

It is impossible to determine the extent to which these South islanders were actually dancing to U.S. popular music, or if, as in many other similar scenarios at the time, the natives were posing for the photograph to comply with the whims of the white visitor. In any case, in spite of the apparent anecdotal nature of the article, it is a symptom of the colonizing dynamics that characterized the international dissemination of both recorded sound and the recording industry in the early twentieth century. It was not simply the encounter of individuals and artifacts from two different cultural milieus. Rather, just as in the colonial ventures of centuries before, it was an arbitrary incursion into a foreign society for the sake of personal gain. Even if acting on his own, and probably well intended, London benefited from the power dynamics that set his society in symbolic and material advantage over the indigenous populations of the South Pacific. For the same matter, his seemingly innocent quest into "the wilds" was part of the same imperial framework that informed the invasion of foreign bodies, cultures, and lands by corporations, machines, and powerful representatives from the United States. If

seen as a metaphor of larger dynamics of colonial exchange, one can certainly understand that not using their hula-hula dance steps to move along the two-step beat—or not posing for the photo—was hardly an option.

London's stories, like those of Mark Twain and others before him—as well as the accounts of a host of ethnographers, missionaries, social scientists, and traveling agents—played a key role in shaping the imperial mindset that fueled the international expansion of U.S. businesses at the time.[3] As a writer for *Talking Machine News* put it in 1903: "There is a big market abroad, and it would be still larger"—in an article also accompanied by a photograph of an indigenous community astonished before a talking machine (Figure 6).[4] However, it was not only that the "four stalwart natives squatting on the ground listening to the Victor" represented the potential of untapped markets, and that the efforts to turn them into new consumers of manufactured goods was part of the civilizing mission of the United States. It was also that their dance steps and embodied culture, as exotic as they were—and by extension their music—offered in themselves a business opportunity for the industry. Since increasing the offer of recorded products proved to ease the commercial outreach of the music industry, recording companies engaged early in the pursuit of musics and other sounding contents worldwide. Recording expeditions, as the ones we will consider throughout this chapter, were crucial not only for the sustained growth of the business but for the sustained relevance of recorded sound within changing narratives about modernity, cosmopolitanism, and entertainment.

[3] See: Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 101–38.
[4] "The Talking Machine in the Tropics," *Talking Machine News* 5, September (1903), 86.

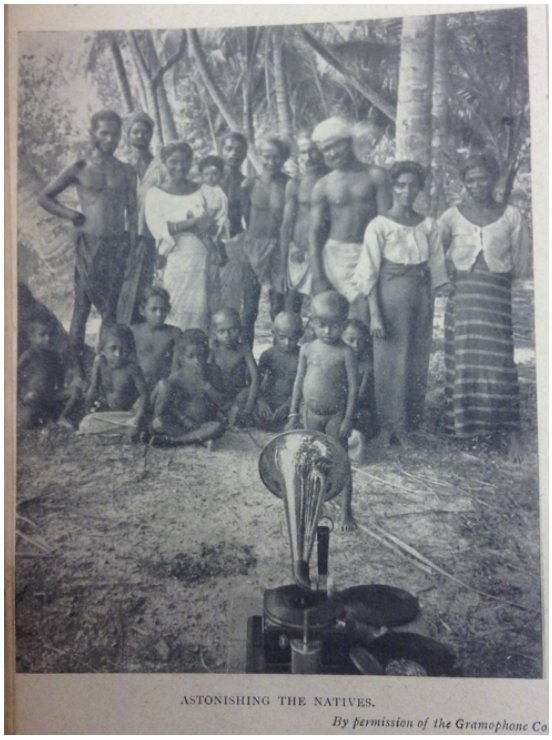

Figure 6: Photograph published in *Talking Machine News* 5, September (1903), 86.

Karl H. Miller has argued that unlike the United States in the 1880s and 1890s, part of the success of the international phonograph trade in the 1900s and 1910s was due in part to the successful capitalization on people's first encounters with the machine. In North America the industry was slow to realize the commercial potential of recorded music—and when it did the fascination with the technology had waned significantly. Conversely, the panorama overseas reflected more of a concomitant relation between the wonderment with the technology and the provision of local musics in commodified records. "Phonograph dealers," Miller writes, "fetishized these images of 'uncivilized' people marveling at the phonograph" to the extent that for many of them "the complacent colonial subject (…) characterized the ideal customer."[5] However, the time for circus-like phonographic demonstrations was long gone. Systematic recording campaigns

[5] Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 167, 170.

worldwide helped grow record catalogs almost exponentially so that phonographs hardly ever traveled disconnected from the marketing structures of the companies. With commercial empires in place, massive consumption could be administrated efficiently. In time, the bewilderment caused by the phonograph gave way to "interest and admiration" and this, paired with the availability of a myriad of records, made possible the assimilation of acousmatic sounds into everyday life as well as the cultural legitimization of the phonograph nearly everywhere.

This chapter focuses on the history of the recording expeditions set by the Victor Talking Machine Company throughout Latin America at the dawn of the twentieth century. Drawing primarily from the travelogues and the recording ledgers written by the scouts, I examine some episodes in their transnational journeys in order to analyze the improvisatory dynamics that characterized their labor on the ground. Their improvisations, I argue, are traces of the extemporaneous character of the recording industry as a whole in the early twentieth century. The global expansion of recorded sound and the consolidation of media empires such as that of Victor and other corporations took place along improvisations around marketing, recording mechanisms, repertoires, personnel, and organizational structures as well as in conjunction with the "civilizing" character of international trade and the distributed nature of business enterprises. While setting up makeshift recording laboratories, the scouts faced multiple challenges, including identifying local talent, negotiating copyright deals and, sometimes, wrangling tardy, drunken performers into the studio. It is clear that these recording scouts were attempting to follow Victor executives' master plan to open up new markets for the phonograph. Yet, it was up to them and the people they worked with to figure out how to put Victor's plans into practice. Some procedures in relation to the operation of the technology

were somewhat foreshadowed as well as certain guidelines and expectations set by the company. Nevertheless, the expeditions implied an unpredictable array of spontaneous decisions. For the most part, just as some of the musicians they brought in front of the recording horn, the scouts were playing by ear.

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine the relationship between the scouts' improvisatory episodes and ideas of improvisation in musical and social realms. My argument builds on the notion of improvisation as discussed by Stephen Greenblatt as well as on the recent contributions made by Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, George Lipsitz, Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, Will Straw, Dana Gooley, Dale Chapman, and other scholars in the fields of jazz, critical improvisation studies, and music-management studies.[6] Furthermore, by exploring how scouts negotiated with performers, middle-men, and translators through a series of mundane encounters, I question top-down histories of the international dimension of recording companies. In other words, I discuss the extent to which the quotidian activities of the scouts offer an alternative to the historical narratives in which the globalization of recorded music is explained, explicitly or implicitly, by the driving impulse of either the companies' heads or the corporations themselves, in abstraction. These top-down narratives, widespread in a myriad of accounts about the history of the phonograph, are usually wrapped up in uncritical phrases like "Edison did," "Columbia recorded," or "Victor accomplished."[7] But who is actually

[6] Greenblatt, "Improvisation and Power"; Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now*; Born, Lewis, and Straw, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*; Dana A Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation: Free Playing in Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018); Chapman, *The Jazz Bubble*; Paul Ingram and Bill Duggan, "Improvisation in Management," in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*; and Morris B. Holbrook, "Playing the Changes on the Jazz Metaphor: An Expanded Conceptualization of Music-, Management-, and Marketing-Related Themes," *Foundations and Trends® in Marketing* 2, no. 3–4 (2008), 185-442.

[7] See for example: Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, 1877-1977*; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Schicke, *Revolution in Sound*; Gronow, "The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium"; Chanan,

Edison, Columbia, and Victor? I believe that by paying attention to the specific actions of specific individuals, in different positions throughout the corporate ladder, we can appreciate more clearly the extemporaneous—and often cluttered and anarchic—interplay that shaped the configuration of modern media emporiums.[8] At the same time, challenging top-down histories hints at the complication of simplistic narratives of cultural imperialism. Although the companies' executives had significant power in the administration of the business, more often than not their agency relied on—or at least was informed by—the interventions of their employees in the here-and-now of music-and-record making as well as in the everyday of marketing, retailing, and corporate representation.

After a quick overview of the expeditions and digging into the circumstances that may have informed Victor's decision to engage directly with Latin America, we will explore some episodes in the lives and voyages of Victor's recording experts—especially during the 1910s—as a point of entry into the analysis of the extemporaneous configuration of Victor's recording business. The scouts' improvisations in relation to the material challenges of the acoustic technology, the cultural dimensions of their engagement with unexpected repertoires, and the extent to which their activities may be considered part of the universe of extractive economies are the critical sequel of the histories examined in this chapter and will be, respectively, the focus of the three following chapters. The examination of these recording expeditions offers us a glimpse into the uneven nature of Victor's

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Repeated Takes; Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*; Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c2004); Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*; Timothy. Day, *A Century of Recorded Music : Listening to Musical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*; Charles K. Wolfe and Ted Olson, *The Bristol Sessions: Writings about the Big Bang of Country Music* (Jefferson, N.C: Mcfarland & Co Inc, 2005); Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*; Millard, *America on Record*.

[8] 5/13/19 1:*23:00 PM*

commercial empire and a far more complicated story of recorded music's global spread.

Reaching out to Latin America

In 1902, while working in India as a talent scout for the Gramophone Company, John Watson Hawd reported the extent of his activities in the following terms: "The native music is to me worse than Turkish but as long as it suits them and sells well what do we care?" Three years later, S. Porter would express an almost identical estimation in view of his experience as a recording technician in the same country: "To be sure the selections are weird, if not altogether grand, gloomy and peculiar, but they sell like hot cakes."[9] And the same year, a phonograph dealer in the Philippines declared: "I believe that if the talking machine manufacturers could get some noted Filipino to sing for recording purposes, or some native orator, the records and the machines would have an enormous sale. All people who can, would buy one simply to hear the local singer or speaker."[10] Indeed, by 1905 metropolitan recording companies had been engaging with local repertoires from various parts of the world for at least five years. The famous recording trips of Fred and Will Gaisberg on behalf of the Gramophone Company through Europe and Asia between 1900 and 1903 as well as the early phonographic incursions of the Edison, Bellini, Pathé, Victor, and Columbia companies in Mexico and Cuba since at least 1903, made manifest the potential of foreign musics and foreign markets for the nascent recording business.[11] In time, the fatigue of sending convoys of talent

[9] Quoted by Miller, "Talking Machine World," 170.
[10] Quoted by Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 171.
[11] See: Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round*, 23–65; Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*, 11–31; John Koegel, "Grabaciones tempranas de música y músicos mexicanos," in *Ensayos de*

scouts and recording technicians—with these roles being often played by the same individuals—paid off. For a good number of years, these companies reaped the fruits of keeping mostly unchallenged monopolies over vast marketing territories.

Between 1903 and 1928, the Victor Talking Machine Company organized more than twenty recording fieldtrips to various cities in Latin America. Almost seven thousand musical selections were recorded, most of which became commercial records within months. One or two recording experts were deployed each time, spending between one and three months on tour. Their luggage included, among other things, a portable recording machine, several flat wax masters, recording horns of various sizes and shapes, sound boxes, spring motors, and dynamos; everything packed in multiple trunks and transported across the hemisphere in transoceanic steamships. Going on an expedition was an exceptional assignment. For the most part, the scouts worked as recording experts in Victor's studios in Camden, New Jersey, and thus, their technical expertise making recordings at Victor's headquarters was somewhat put to the test when facing the unpredictable conditions of the various locations overseas in which they had to set up makeshift studios.

The expeditions began in 1903 with a trip to Mexico City, followed by another visit to the same city two years later. In 1907 and 1908 Victor sent expeditions to Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Early in 1910 the scouts went again to Cuba, and in November, at the onset of the Mexican Revolution, they made recordings in Mexico City. Havana was one of the most common destinations. Besides the trips in 1907 and 1910, the company sent expeditions to

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investigación musical, vol. 2 (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 2008); Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 101.

the island almost every year between 1911 and 1927. Some excursions consisted of a single trip to a particular country while others implied a journey through two or more nations. In the first half of 1912, for example, the scouts went to Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro; in the second half of 1913, they visited Lima in Peru, and Bogotá in Colombia; and in the summer and fall of 1914, they traveled through Cuba and Trinidad. The outbreak of the Great War in Europe seems to have put Victor's transoceanic travels on hold, but not for long; by mid-October 1916, a team was already making recordings in Havana. During 1917, a pair of scouts spent almost the whole year on tour. First, they went to Puerto Rico and Venezuela, and after a few days in the United States, they embarked in what was apparently the longest of the expeditions across the region. Between March and November, they toured through Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, with blank and recorded masters going back and forth between New Jersey and different stations in South America. Nevertheless, this was, apparently, the last transnational excursion. From 1918 and through the 1920s, the company focused its international campaigns on Cuba, Mexico, and Argentina, taking advantage of the satellite offices, studios, and factories it established in some of those places. Yet, Victor did not neglect the music *from* nor the market *in* the other countries of the Americas. Recordings of Latin American music kept taking place in Victor's studios in New York and New Jersey, either by Latin American musicians visiting the United States or by North American performers playing arranged versions of music scores collected from various places in the hemisphere.[12]

[12] Recording Ledgers of the Victor Talking Machine Company, 1905-1917 at the Special Collections Archive of the University of California in Santa Barbara, and SONY Music (in New York). See: *Discography of American Historical Recordings* (https://adp.library.ucsb.edu); Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*; Franceschi, *A Casa Edison e seu tempo*; and the appendix at the end of this dissertation.

Besides the various factors around the imperial push towards international trade and the terms of Victor's transatlantic partnership with the Gramophone Company—as discussed in chapter one—it is hard to determine the specifics of the company's decision of going abroad. Sadly, most of Victor's corporate papers seem to be irremediably lost, but we can still gather some details, stories, and clues from the recording experts' memoirs, the recording ledgers, and the vast assortment of Victor's publications. Through Harry Sooy's reminiscences we know, for instance, that towards the end of 1902 the technicians at the recording department were "completing a Portable Recording Machine" meant to "be used for Export Recording in foreign countries"—a replica of the spring-motor-operated machine "designed by Mr. J.C. English," and which was used by the company at its recording facilities in Philadelphia.[13] According to Paul D. Fischer, the portable machine was tested the next year in Mexico City, in what seems to have been Victor's first international recording expedition; a trip carried through by William H. Nafey, one of the heads of Victor's recording department at the time.[14] It is possible that the interest for international recording journeys had been triggered by Calvin C. Child, manager of Artists and Repertoire and of the recording laboratory, who had been in a business trip to Europe in 1902 securing "Red Seal" matrices recorded by the Gramophone Co. Alternatively—or concurrently—the 1903 expedition to Mexico may have been an attempt to challenge the monopoly that the Edison company had in that country.

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[13] Harry O. Sooy, *Memoir of My Career at Victor Talking Machine Company, 1898-1925* (Unpublished manuscript, 1925), 25.

[14] Paul D. Fischer, "The Sooy Dynasty of Camden, New Jersey: Victor's First Family of Recording," *Journal on the Art of Record Production*, no. 7 (November 2012), http://www.arpjournal.com/asarpwp/the-sooy-dynasty-of-camden-new-jersey-victor's-first-family-of-recording/. Unfortunately, the ledgers from this expedition, if any, seem to no have survived. The earliest ledgers available from the Latin American expeditions, as we will see, are from 1905.

Indeed, Mexico was the first foreign nation that signed, in 1890, an exclusive contract with Thomas A. Edison for the use of the phonograph in the postal service. It seems that Edison's business plan of promoting the phonograph as an office tool captured the interest of Mexican authorities much more than of politicians and entrepreneurs in the United States. In the end, however, the plan did not come to fruition in Mexico due to the popularization of the telephone in the realm of communications, but had Edison advanced with it, most likely he would not have failed as dramatically as he did with the same business plan in the United States.[15] To a significant extent, the phonograph was concomitant with Mexican president Porfirio Díaz's rhetoric of progress and modernity. Even more so, Díaz himself became very close with Edison, and exchanged gifts and phonograph letters with the inventor. At least twice, in 1890 and in 1909, they sent each ocher their voices in cylinders. The laudatory message that Díaz sent to Edison, filled with phrases like "hero of talent," and "benefactor of mankind," was even commercialized as a record and sold in both the United States and Mexico.[16] It comes as no surprise, then, that already in 1888 Díaz had granted Edison exclusivity for his business in Mexico. This might be part of the reason why Edison, of all companies, was the first in setting a satellite office in Mexico—one of the very first of its kind in the international picture of the phonograph business. Thus, Nafey's trip in 1903 on behalf of the Victor Talking Machine Company, and Victor's subsequent

[15] Díaz Frene, "A las palabras ya no se las lleva el viento," 257–68. The deal between Edison and Mexico would have certainly been more beneficial for the North American inventor. As he was providing the service and the equipment, Edison was to get the 90% of the profit (Díaz Frene, 267). On Edison's idea and the failure of his initial business plans with the phonograph as a dictation machine, phonograph letters, phonograph dolls, etc. see: Edison, "The Phonograph and Its Future"; Millard, *America on Record*; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, 1877-1977*; Schicke, *Revolution in Sound*.

[16] Díaz Frene, "A las palabras ya no se las lleva el viento," 267–68; See: Koegel, "Grabaciones Tempranas de Música y Músicos Mexicanos," 66.

expeditions to Mexico might have well been, arguably, a strategic move to control the expansion of one of its chief competitors in the trade. Columbia announced in 1904, possibly for the same reasons, the establishment of a record laboratory in Mexico City.[17]

The foreign lands of Africa, Asia, and Latin America filled the imagination of exporting entrepreneurs in the United States—eager to convert those peoples to the gospel of consumption. Although the vast territories of Africa and East Asia (mostly China) were prominent in such imagination, in the end it was Latin America that came to be the most profitable region for the trade ventures of many U.S. businesses. This was due, in part, to the expediency of the operations within the hemisphere and the imperialist hegemony of the United States across the continent. For example, in 1896, while $7 million worth in exports went to China, $93 million rolled to Central and South America, and five years later, while exports to China did not go beyond $10 million, Cuba alone received $26 million in U.S. merchandise—a figure that would reach $165 million by 1916. Likewise, more than 70% of the commodities that Colombia was importing by 1919 came from the United States.[18] Furthermore, the interference in Panama for the construction of the interoceanic canal, among many other instances of U.S. interventionism throughout the region in the early twentieth century, facilitated not only exporting ventures from the United States but, more broadly, the dependency of Latin American economies on such influx of manufactured goods. As Jacobson points out and as we will examine in detail in chapter five, "[a]lthough this story perhaps ends on the theme of imperialistic extraction—extraction of natural resources, of cheap labor, of

[17] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 16.
[18] Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 40–41.

advantage—it begins with the quest for markets."[19]

Latin America was a natural target for the activities of recording companies. Part of the original rationale behind Victor's expeditions was to produce records that could be sold primarily in the same locales where they were made. Eventually, however, as the company proved the potential of those discs to captivate audiences in other places, the recordings were advertised and commercialized in the United States just as in almost every outpost of Victor's commercial empire. At the beginning, the recordings made during the tours were pressed in the Camden factory and then exported back to the Latin American countries of origin, but by the 1920s, as Gronow, Cañardo, and others have pointed out, records factories had been already established in Mexico, Argentina, and apparently in Brazil.[20]

It might be reasonable to argue that the recording industry—and the retailing activities of the Victor company in particular—played a crucial role in the inauguration of the scenario of massive consumption of U.S.-made goods in Latin America. In other words, considering the prevailing picture in historiography that depicts the blossoming of such era of massive consumption in the 1920s, the popularity and increasing sales of phonograph products seem to offer an intriguing panorama of massive consumption before massive consumption.[21] Although the exports from the United States to Latin America had been growing significantly since the end of the nineteenth century—as mentioned above—it is not until the years following the Great War in Europe that U.S. products would really take the lead over their European counterparts and that their consumption would begin to

[19] Jacobson, 40.
[20] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 16; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*, 46–56. See: Pérez G., "A indústria fonográfica."
[21] See: Fernando Rocchi, *Consumption in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 2016), http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935369.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935369-e-14.

reach massive proportions throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The weakening of European economies coupled with the renewed imperialist impetus of the United States helped secure the political and economic leadership of the "Northern Colossus" in the region as well as the vast dissemination of goods manufactured either in the United States or in local factories controlled by U.S. businesses—from soap and toothpaste to talking machines and cars.[22] Yet, not only had Victor and other companies begun commercializing and distributing talking machines and records with increasing sales proportions throughout Latin America since the early 1900s but, as I show in subsequent chapters, their advertising and marketing strategies aiming to massive populations across social classes preceded the expansion of other industries.

But it was more than a systemic and growing exporting program. The imperial dynamics that propelled the hegemony of the United States and of transnational corporations like Victor across the Americas were, in the first place, brought forth and sustained by a multiplicity of "imperial encounters 'on the ground'", that is, the mundane interactions between U.S. agents of various kinds and diverse individuals in Latin America.[23] As Gilbert Joseph explains, their encounters and engagements "designate the connectedness of specific material and discursive interactions in the contact zones of empire"; thus, these encounters could potentially account for seemingly contradictory scenarios: on the one hand, "attempts by people of different 'cultures' to enter into relationships that need not

[22] See: Jennifer Scanlon, "Mediators in the International Marketplace: U.S. Advertising in Latin America in the Early Twentieth Century," *Business History Review; Boston* 77, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 387–415; Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Century of U.S. Capitalism in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Gilderhus, *The Second Century*; Melina Piglia, "Automobile Tourism in Argentina (1920-1950)," *Tempo Social* 30, no. 2 (August 2018): 87–111.

[23] Joseph, "Close Encounters: Toward a New Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations," 7.

deny or obliterate the subjectivity of the other party" as in "efforts to understand, empathize with, approach the other" or "gestures to establish some type of bond, commitment, or contract"; and on the other hand, these same kinds of encounters could also derive in "contestation and conflict" as the very etymology of the word "encounter," from the Latin, suggests: "the word fuses *in* ('in') with *contra* ('against')."[24] With these ideas in mind, let us consider now some of the encounters of Victor's traveling technicians with a host of people in Latin America in the course of their recording voyages.

Recorders Turned into Scouts and Other Tales of Unrehearsed Itinerancy

Recording experts in the acoustic era worked mostly behind the scenes—and often times literally behind curtains, walls, and glass barriers. Thus, from the onset of their careers, their efforts, contributions, and interventions were unacknowledged and frequently regarded as non-transcendental, merely technical and ordinary, or simply taken for granted. As Fischer puts it, based on the testimonies left by some of them, "[t]heir work turned them into international travelers, befriended by some of the world's great artists and political figures, but to many whose work they captured, they were merely the mysterious 'faces in the window.'"[25] Nonetheless, the labor of these recording experts was certainly essential for the purposes of the industry, and it played a crucial role in shaping the contours of the recording business. Their daily actions, particularly in the context of their scouting activities overseas, were instrumental for the global expansion of companies like Victor in particular, and of recorded sound in general. Through a series of improvisatory

[24] Joseph, 7–8.
[25] Fischer, "The Sooy Dynasty of Camden."

strategies and collaborations with local people, these recording experts—turned by such commissions into talent and recording scouts—participated in the configuration of novel commercial categories, such as "foreign" and "ethnic" records, as well as in the development of transnational networks for the ongoing extraction, marketing, and distribution of musical sounds.[26] Although they acted on behalf of the company and worked under the supervision of other employees at Victor's headquarters, the scouts were pretty much on their own when making decisions or improvising actions in the field. Woefully, countless episodes are irretrievable due to the inherent incompleteness of the historical archive—an issue to which I will return in chapter four. Nevertheless, we still have records of a few incidents at our disposal.

To begin with, at least ten of Victor's recording experts—all men—also acted, at some point or another, as recording scouts. Let's take a quick look into who they were and where they went, albeit the information about them is, to say the least, scarce:

1. The aforementioned William H. Nafey (1864–c.1931), a native of the New Jersey area, conducted the two first expeditions, both to Mexico City in 1903 and 1905, and later expeditions to Brazil and Argentina (in 1907) and China (in 1908), to which he was traveled with his wife.
2. Henry J. Hagen (1862-1912), the son of German immigrants, was already registered in 1890 as a "phonograph operator" in Orange, NJ (presumably working for Edison), and in a 1900 census as a manufacturer of musical records. He may have been part of five recording expeditions: three (1905 to Cuba, 1906 to Europe, and 1908 to Mexico) with the Zonophone Company,

[26] About "foreign" and "ethnic" records, see chapter one.

which Victor would eventually purchase, and two with the Victor company (1911 to Cuba, and 1912 to Brazil and Argentina with Charles Althouse—see below). He got sick two months after his return from South America and passed away one month later.

3. Harry O. Sooy (1876-1927) was the oldest of three brothers who worked for Victor as recording experts—and to whom we will devote a few lines later. In 1907, Harry went on his first international recording expedition to Cuba, only two weeks after the death of his six-year-old son. "The firm," Harry wrote in his memories, "knowing we felt this loss keenly, sent me to Cuba on a recording trip February 23rd, allowing me to take Mrs. [Joanna] Sooy with me. (…) I made, during this trip 171 records."[27] Five months later he went on an expedition to Mexico, and then, in the spring of 1913 to another one in Cuba. In both of these trips his wife came with him; for the 1913 trip Frank Rambo (see below) also came along in order to be trained by Harry in the arts of field recording.
4. Raymond R. Sooy (1880-1938), Harry's younger brother, was registered in a 1900 census as a "machinist"; he was 19 years old and a little later became a Victor employee. He went on recording expeditions to Mexico (1908), Havana (1909), and Buenos Aires (1910); he traveled at least three times to England in the 1920s to assist, as a consultant expert from the Victor company, some technical procedures at the Gramophone Company. In all his trips, just like Nafey and his brother but unlike most of the other recording scouts, Raymond Sooy traveled with his wife, Mrs. Ruby Sooy.

[27] Sooy, *Memoir of My Career*, 34.

5. Charles E. Sooy (1885-1945) was the youngest of the Sooy brothers, also accounted as “machinist” in 1900. His recording activities with Victor seemed to have been primarily tied to the laboratory in Camden and to some recording commissions in different places within the United States. Apparently, his only international expedition was to Cuba in 1911 with Henry Hagen.
6. George K. Cheney (1871-1937) grew up in upstate New York, the son of a relatively well-known house painter in the area. At the turn of the century, Cheney was already working on (and patenting) mechanical improvements in the recording mechanism and was directing a recording laboratory for the Universal Talking Machine Company—which would be eventually purchased by Victor. Cheney also worked as a recording technician for the Zonophone Company, in which role he apparently went to China in 1906. He joined the Victor company in May of 1914, and from June to September he participated in the recording expedition to Cuba and Trinidad. The next year he toured through Korea, China, and Japan; in 1916, he went again to Cuba, and during 1917, he was one of the scouts in the long transnational expedition to multiple countries in the Caribbean and South America. Then, Cheney went to Cuba every year between 1918 and 1923—except in 1922—and helped with Victor’s factory in Argentina in 1923 and 1925.
7. Charles S. Althouse (1894-1968) was born in Philadelphia, but was already living in Camden, NJ when he was 15; by the time he was 20 he was already working for Victor. His father was a storekeeper in a shipyard—or besides working as a storekeeper he worked in a shipyard. Althouse and Cheney may have been the Victor recording scouts who traveled the most

through the early 1920s. Althouse, who apparently was fluent enough in Spanish, partook in at least eight expeditions—many of them with Cheney: 1912 (Argentina and Brazil), 1913 (Peru and Colombia), 1914 (Cuba and Trinidad), 1915 (China, Korea, and Japan), 1916 (Cuba), 1917 (the long expedition across the continent), 1919 and 1920 (Cuba)—following his enrollment in the U.S. Army for World War II—and 1925 (also to Cuba). In 1923, Althouse worked at the Pan American Recording Company (the name of Victor's factory in Argentina) but his mission ended suddenly after he was accidently hit by a car in Buenos Aires. By 1930, he had joined the Vitaphone Corporation (eventually Warner Brothers), in which he worked for more than three decades and participated in the production of many movies and TV shows.

8. Frank S. Rambo (1884-1917), a native from Philadelphia, was the son of a merchant/milk dealer—a profession followed also by at least of one of Rambo's brothers. He joined the Victor staff of traveling recorders to replace Henry Hagen and participated in two recording expeditions in 1913: Cuba (with Harry Sooy) and Peru-Colombia (with Charles Althouse). He could not go to any more tours afterwards. Having arrived with serious health problems, he took some time off in February of the following year, and a little later Victor sent him to Albuquerque, NM, to regain his health. He would return to Victor's headquarters in Camden in 1916, but not for long. He died in 1917, just a few days after his 33rd birthday. George Cheney assumed his position.
9. William J. Linderman (1894-1975), the son of an Irish immigrant woman and a New Jersey Police officer, participated in recording excursions to Cuba in

1918 (with George Cheney) and 1924. Also, in 1924, he made recordings in Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and apparently to some places in what are today Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. He kept traveling regularly to South America through the 1950s and lived in Brazil for some time during World War II.

10. Lewis W. Layton (1900-1964) was born and raised in Camden, NJ; his father was a butcher. Before joining the Victor company, Layton worked as a clerk in a factory also in Camden. His first expedition was to Cuba in 1923 (accompanying George Cheney) and he seems to have provided also technical support in Victor's factory in Argentina around 1925 and 1926. Layton worked for Victor (then RCA) for almost 50 years and won three Grammy Awards for his work as a recording engineer with classical music. He died of a heart attack at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City.[28]

The three Sooy brothers—Harry, Raymond, and Charles—were "working class descendants of eighteenth century Dutch Huguenot immigrants to the United States" who became something of a "dynasty" of recording experts at the Victor company.[29] Harry, the oldest, worked for Victor nearly throughout the entire existence of the company—from 1898 until his death in 1927. He began running

[28] Most of the information about these ten individuals come from the autobiographies of Harry and Raymond Sooy (Sooy, *Memoir of My Career*; Raymond Sooy, *Memoirs of My Recording and Traveling Experiences for the Victor Talking Machine Company* (Unpublished manuscript, 1925), http://www.davidsarnoff.org/soo.html.) as well as from the extensive research made by Hugo Strötbaum, available at his website: Strötbaum, "Recording Pioneers." See also: Fischer, "The Sooy Dynasty of Camden"; B. L. Aldridge, *The Victor Talking Machine Company*, ed. Frederic Bayh (Camden: RCA Victor, 1964); Lawrence P. Gooley, "George Cheney: Recording Pioneer, Crown Point Native -," The Adirondack Almanack, August 6, 2012, https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2012/08/george-cheney-recording-pioneer-crown-point-native.html; Luis Salazar M., "Rambo en Lima: Las grabaciones de la 'Victor' en septiembre de 1913," *Músicas del Perú* (blog), accessed February 21, 2017, http://folcloremusicalperuano.blogspot.com/2010/09/rambo-en-lima-las-grabaciones-de-la.html.

[29] Fischer, "The Sooy Dynasty of Camden."

various jobs at Johnson's workshop and by the end of 1900 he had completed his apprenticeship and became a "full-fledged recorder."[30] Raymond started his career at Victor's recording laboratory as an "assistant recorder" in August 1903, two days before his wedding, but by November of the same year he was already operating the recording machine on his own. Five months later, he signed his first contract for $936 annually—roughly equivalent to $27,000 today—plus additional profit bonuses, although after the first six months he only collected a dividend payment of $26.64 (about $750 nowadays). By 1907, Charles, the youngest brother, was also part of the company.[31] Through the 1920s, the Sooy brothers, especially Harry and Raymond, climbed up in the corporate hierarchy—but never to an executive level. Harry became, in sequence, "Chief of the Recording Staff" (1909), "member of the Recording and Matrix Committee" (1913), "Manager of Recording Departments" (1916), and "Superintendent of Recording" (1923), while Raymond usually followed suit taking up the positions his brother left behind—although it is possible that rather than actual promotions it was more a matter of corporate changes in the way of naming divisions and responsibilities.[32] "Despite their key role on the technical side of things," Fischer writes, "the Sooys had no input on who and what got recorded."[33] At the same time, however, as we will discuss later, their insight as well as that of the other recording scouts may have been crucial in the corporate configuration of records catalogs, marketing categories, and distribution patterns. More importantly, their technical capital and intermediation shaped the material

[30] Sooy, *Memoir of My Career*, 14.
[31] Sooy, *Memoirs*, entries for August 17, 1903 to April 1, 1904; Fischer, "The Sooy Dynasty of Camden." The income equivalence has been calculated according to the information of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, see: "$936 in 1904 → 2018 | Inflation Calculator." U.S. Official Inflation Data, Alioth Finance, 18 Dec. 2018, https://www.officialdata.org/1904-dollars-in-2018?amount=936.
[32] Sooy, *Memoir of My Career*, 42, 55, 59, 97; Sooy, *Memoirs*, February 1, 1916.
[33] Fischer, "The Sooy Dynasty of Camden."

production of the records. To be sure, "[f]or the entire existence of the Victor Talking Machine Company as an independent corporate entity (1901-1929), there was a Sooy at or near the helm of the recordings that it made."[34] In the next chapter, we will consider in detail the technological procedures, material challenges, and improvisatory dynamics pertaining to the making of acoustic recordings in the fieldtrip scenarios of the recording expeditions. Let us explore now a few episodes in the scouts' journeys across Latin America.

Despite the arrangements and contacts that were made in preparation for each trip, going on a recording expedition was in itself a journey into unpredictable situations. Sometimes, as we will see, a representative of the company would travel in advance to line up the performers and set other things ready before the arrival of the recorders. Eventually local dealers, musicians, or intermediaries could be appointed with the same mission. More often than not, however, the scouts seemed to have departed without major preparations in place. That was possibly the case with Harry Sooy's trip to Cuba in February 1907; while the tour offered an extemporaneous scene-changing opportunity for Harry and his wife after the loss of their child, it also provided the company with an unexpected, abundant, and equally extemporaneous provision of Cuban recordings. But even with logistical provisions taken care of in advance, a recording tour entailed, almost by definition, an unforeseen array of events. In his account of his 1910 excursion to Buenos Aires, Raymond Sooy included the following anecdote:

[34] Fischer. In 1924, Harry Sooy helped established Victor's recording facilities in Oakland, CA, as part of Victor's plan to expand its operations to the West Coast. Harry died in Oakland in 1927 and Raymond replaced him in his position as Victor's Superintendent of Recording. Around this time, as the electric era blossomed and with it multiple endeavors in the entertainment industry, Victor's recording department grew to nearly sixty employees. Raymond and Charles kept working for Victor for a while but left the company after it was bought by RCA. Raymond moved on to work in sound synchronization in the movie business, and died of a heart attack in 1938, at the age of 59. Charles lived until 1945.

> During our voyage to South America, we learned that it is usually the custom to initiate all passengers who are crossing the equator for the first time. The ceremonies are very interesting. They have Father Neptune and all of his aides dressed up in their full regalia, and all who are to be initiated are informed beforehand to put on their bathing suits. The initiation consists of lathering your face with a whitewash brush and a bucket of suds and shaving you with a large wooden razor, then giving you a drink of salt water, and a few other funny stunts, winding up with throwing you into the swimming pool. Naturally, the windup starts a general rough house, and everybody in sight is thrown into the pool—many not [with] time to don bathing suits. The Captain of the ship usually stands by to see that it does not get too rough, and then he gives you a signed certificate which entitles you to all the rights and privileges to cross the equator at all times unmolested.[35]

These kinds of initiation or hazing rituals were relatively common—and sometimes particularly brutal—among sailors and navy personnel since at least the eighteenth century; eventually, cruise liners transporting civilians fashioned entertaining and user-friendly versions of the line-crossing ritual, as the one witnessed by Sooy.[36] By his account it looks like it was indeed an entirely novel experience for him. Yet, even if he was somewhat conscious about it, he had never crossed the equator before, had never taken part in the rite scenario, and was, at the very least, caught unaware of several details of the ceremony. And so was, probably, his wife, also on board. In a way, Raymond Sooy's anecdote is a symptom of the scouts' experience of being deployed for a recording expedition: knowing the particularities of their craft and their mission and, at the same time, not knowing what was going to happen—but working their way out as the events in the tours unfolded.

On July 13, 1913, Frank Rambo and Charles Althouse sailed for Lima, Peru, via the Panama Canal. That was the first tour Victor commissioned to the northern west coast of South America. Victor's strategy implied pursuing connections with

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[35] Sooy, *Memoirs*, entry for January 20, 1910.
[36] See: Simon J Bronner, *Crossing the Line: Violence, Play, and Drama in Naval Equator Traditions* ([Amsterdam]: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Henning Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator: Sailor's Baptism and Other Initiation Rites. With a Danish Summary* ([Copenhagen]: Munksgaard, 1961).

key individuals or local institutions—such as music stores, schools, and publishers—in order to get access to musicians and repertoire that would be popular or characteristic of local sounds and aesthetic tastes. This strategy implied a whole chain of intermediaries. Frank Rambo connected with Casa Castellanos and with Rogelio Soto, a Peruvian music producer, who, in turn, connected the scouts with local musicians Miguel Almeneiro and Alejandro Ayarza, who, finally, facilitated the access to other performers. As a matter of fact, the house of Miguel Almeneiro functioned as a recording laboratory for some days.[37] In Lima, Rambo and Althouse recorded 202 pieces in three weeks. Around 15 different artists and groups were part of these sessions, including solo instrumentalists like Alejandro Gómez Morón, vocal duets such as the famous Hermanas Gastelú, and diverse ensembles like the Estudiantina Chalaca or La Banda del Regimiento de Gendarmes de Lima.[38] Peruvian music had appeared on records, apparently for the first time, two years before, when the duet of Montes and Manrique recorded about 200 pieces for Columbia in New York. Through 1912 Columbia released 90 of those recordings in Lima, and both the sales and the popularity of Montes and Manrique skyrocketed. In view of such success, the French company Pathé attempted to recruit other performers to make recordings of Peruvian music in

[37] Gerard Borras and Fred Rohner, *La música popular peruana. Lima-Arequipa (1913-1917). Los archivos de la Victor Talking Machine*, Linear notes (Instituto Frances de Estudios Andinos, Instituto de Etnomusicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2013), 13–26; Salazar M., "Rambo en Lima."
[38] For a list of the performers and pieces recorded, see: *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, s.v. "Matrix Sub Series 1913: Havana, Lima, and Colombia," accessed February 21, 2017, http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/index. The project that began originally as the *Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings* began to include since 2014 historical data about Columbia, Berliner's Gramophone Co, Brunswick, Okeh, and other companies so that it eventually became the *Discography of American Historical Recordings* (*DHAR*), still administered by University of California in Santa Barbara: http://adp.library.ucsb.edu.

Paris.[39] Unlike Columbia and Pathé, Victor sent Rambo and Althouse with a bulk of acoustic equipment to recruit local talent and make the recordings directly in Lima.

Seemingly, the original plan was to record only Peruvian selections. In the end, though, the scouts also gathered Ecuadorian music in Lima and, instead of returning directly to the United States, they stopped in Panama, sent a shipment of records to New Jersey for manufacture, changed steamships, and navigated up the Colombian Magdalena River towards Bogotá. It looks like it was during the layover in Panama that, in communication via telegram with Harry Sooy and other employees at Camden, the decision was made to extend the tour and visit Colombia in order to make "records of the natives for that part of the world."[40] In Bogotá they recorded, in sixteen days, 120 pieces performed by about 17 different artists and small orchestras, including Union Musical, Quinteto Rubiano, the duet of Alejandro Wills and Alberto Escobar, and the Terceto Sánchez-Calvo.[41] In order to recruit local talent, and more particularly, in assessing which local artists represented the best investment for the phonographic business, the participation of Manuel Gaitán, the owner of one of the biggest music stores in Bogotá at the time, seems to have been crucial, as well as the intermediation of the musician Jorge Rubiano. Likewise, the artistic circle of the Conservatorio Nacional de Música (National Music Conservatory) was very influential. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the music of Luis A. Calvo had the largest presence in those pioneering

[39] Luis Salazar M., "Rambo en Lima,"; Gérard Borras and Fred Rohner, *Montes y Manrique 1911-2011. Cien años de música peruana.*, Liner Notes (Instituto Frances de Estudios Andinos, Instituto de Etnomusicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2011).
[40] Sooy, *Memoir of My Career*, 56. As we will see in chapters four and five, the preposition "for" here is not a mistake ("records of the natives *for* that part of the world"). It signals the original purpose of this and the other expeditions: to produce records of local musics that could be marketed in the same places in which they were recorded.
[41] See: Cortés Polanía, *La música nacional*, 154; Bermúdez, *Historia de la música*, 115–23; Bermúdez, "From Colombian »national« song to »Colombian Song«," 225–30.

sessions. Calvo's popularity had been on the rise since 1910 due to the increasing appeal of his performances in multiple venues and the national circulation of his compositions in sheet music, besides the remarkable fluidity of his musical production between various social and artistic circles.[42]

Up to this point, Victor completed over 3,000 recordings in Latin America. About 4,000 more were to be made in the following decade, but Rambo, as we saw above, would not live much longer and would not participate in any other recording journey. The Cheney-Althouse team was to be the protagonist of most of the following voyages. Their first trip together was to Cuba and Trinidad. Cheney was 43 years old, Althouse, 20.

Victor and Columbia had made recordings of Trinidadian music in 1912, when the ensemble led by George R. L. Baillie (a.k.a Lovey) toured the U.S. under the name of Trinidad Dance Orchestra, although the records came out as Lovey's Trinidad String Band.[43] Following on the commercial success of Lovey's Band records, Victor sent its recording experts in the summer of 1914—a move that echoed the expedition to Lima. This time, however, a Victor representative named Theodore Terry arrived in the island two weeks before, with the mission of arranging the performers and having "everything in readiness so that Mr. Cheney may begin his work at once"—as a local newspaper in Port of Spain announced it.[44] The same newspaper commented on the arrival of Cheney and Althouse aboard the steamship Matura on August 27, describing their visit as a "special trip to Trinidad for the purpose of recording a complete repertoire of Trinidadian music

[42] Sergio Ospina Romero, *Dolor que canta. La vida y la música de Luis A. Calvo en la sociedad colombiana de comienzos del siglo XX* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2017), 107–11.
[43] Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*, 183–85.
[44] *Port of Spain Gazette*, August 28, 1914, quoted by Hugo Strötbaum: http://recordingpioneers.com/RP_CHENEY1.html, accessed December 19, 2018.

including the Pasillos[,] Spanish Waltz and Two steps by well known Bands; also Carnival and Patois songs and East Indian selections by local talent."[45] Another newspaper announced the recording sessions, pointing out the anxiety it was causing on some musicians: "We understand that Mr. Henry Julian [a.k.a Iron Duke, Julian White Rose, or J. Resigna] (…) has been practicing assiduously for the above purpose and that several other bands and performers have been engaged."[46] Except for one day, Cheney and Althouse held recording sessions in Port of Spain every day for almost two weeks. Besides the indefatigable artistry of Henry Julian, they recorded the famous orchestra of Lionel Belasco and other popular performers in the local scene such as Jules Sims, Gellum Hossein, and the Orquesta Venezolana de Chargo—an ensemble possibly made up of a combination of Trinidadian creoles and immigrants from Venezuela. Although Victor did not release commercially many of the 83 recordings made in this trip, it made sure to have some records ready on time for the Carnival season of 1915.[47] By then, Cheney and Althouse were getting ready—if not already on route—for an expedition through East Asia. And following another trip to Cuba towards the end of 1916, to which Theodore Terry also came along, these two recording experts embarked on what was the longest expedition they ever made—and that took them through at least seven countries in South America and the Caribbean.

The daily ledgers of the expeditions were written by the scouts themselves. For the most part, they provide a detailed inventory of the various performers and pieces recorded day after day, with observations about instrumentation, copyright

[45] *Port of Spain Gazette*, August 28, 1914, quoted by Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*, 192. See also: Paul Vernon, "Island-O-Phone," April 17, 1997, http://www.bolingo.org/audio/texts/fr161island.html.
[46] *Mirror* [Port of Spain], August 28, 1914 (sic), quoted by Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*, 192.
[47] Victor Recording ledgers (Trinidad, September 1914); *DAHR* (Victor's G series); Cowley, 192–93.

issues, the character of the music, the composers, the material configuration of the different items in the recording equipment, and specific circumstances during the sessions. The ledgers for the long expedition of 1917 include many more details than the ledgers from the previous tours. For instance, in this trip, the scouts kept a daily record of the times in which they held the recording sessions. In general, the time frames invested in the laboratory are rather inconsistent, to say the least. They usually began the sessions between nine and ten in the morning, but there were days in which they had their laboratory already set up much earlier. A recording session with a single performer or ensemble could take as little as two hours or as long as six hours or more. Two or three recording blocks took place each day, having regularly one in the morning and another (or two more) in either or both the afternoon and the evening. Some days, however, recording sessions began as late as two or three in the afternoon, lasting only two or three hours, while other days they recorded only at night, and yet others they had intense journeys that began early in the evening and prolonged until way past midnight. In short, the scouts had to accommodate their work-time to the quotidian peculiarities of each city (or each performer), just as they had to arrange and re-arrange the various components of their material paraphernalia according to the characteristics of each musical number and the acoustic conditions of each place they had to turn into a recording studio.

More often than not, things did not go according to plan—scheduled musicians would not show up or forgot their instruments and parts; quite frequently, they were not prepared enough to perform flawlessly or to adapt their art to the technical peculiarities and capturing limitations of the technology—and neither were their instruments, since the scouts sometimes had to intervene in their material

physiognomy in order to guarantee an acceptable sonic rendition when playing back the recordings—as shown in in chapter three. Hence, recording sessions usually took longer than expected. When performing live, time was not a major constraint, but in the recording laboratory, performers had to cut or add sections, play faster or slower throughout, change the tempo at different spots or improvise *ritardandos* and *accelerandos*, alter dynamics, modify lyrics, insert sudden cadences, or improvise other arrangements. And so did, in their own way, Cheney and Althouse. But the scouts did not only have to deal with the musicians. Local dealers and other intermediaries sometimes had a say—either solicited or not—about the selection of the performers, the quality of the recordings, or even the administration of the recording sessions.

Between July 29 and August 1 (Sunday to Wednesday), the scouts spent most of the time traveling—from La Paz to Guaqui (in Bolivia), and then to Puno and Arequipa (in Peru), with an additional trip to Mollendo, in the Peruvian west coast, for the shipping of the recordings made in Bolivia, and then back to Arequipa for a new set of recording sessions. On Thursday, they set their lab, and on Friday they penned their frustration for the derelict preparations made by the "Messers. Riega Rivera + Co." (or at least one of them, apparently a music merchant in Arequipa). The scouts wrote in the ledgers: "Riega says [there is] no talent. Done nothing. Ha[d] two months notice."[48] Over the weekend, Cheney and Althouse had to solve a situation with their shipping trunks in Mollendo, and on Tuesday, either because Riega figured something out or the scouts recruited some performers on

[48] Victor Recording ledgers (Arequipa, Peru, August 3, 1917). The mention to Riega's company appears towards of the end of the ledgers book in a list with the names and addresses of different dealers, businesses, and intermediaries in Buenos Aires, Santiago, Valparaiso, Antofagasta, Iquique, La Paz, Cochabamba, Arequipa, Lima, and Guayaquil.

their own, the sessions in Arequipa started off with the duet of the Hermanos Soto. Complications with Riega kept surfacing. On Wednesday, the circumstances surrounding the recording of a comedian resulted more confusing than entertaining:

> Riega brough[t] man to lab. to make comic records. Said he would like four [done] by AM. After he heard this man[']s stuff in lab. he acted very peculiarly. Left laboratory for one hour and then wrote note to Mr. Cheney, saying he did not want any records of this man. (Did not tell Cheney in person – but left lab.) Riega brought crowd to lab. against orders.[49]

It appears that the comedian, a "Sr. Valdivia," was not really amusing—or at least not that morning—but Riega realized that only while the recordings were being made. Althouse was presumably proficient in Spanish but maybe not enough as to being able to judge the either comical or dull potential of Mr. Valdivia's performaces. Upset but still clueless, the recording experts did not comment any further. The next day Riega gave them more trouble. Althouse, who seems to have been the one jotting down most of these incidents, wrote in the ledgers: "Riega fooled with talent [the musicians] and would not work. Impeded our work in this manner (against our 5 mins. stir[r]ings) until 10:45[pm], when he tried to chase the Trios for an hour and have them come back." Riega kept changing performers, bringing people he barely knew, trying to persuade musicians to return and make more recordings, or even playing around with his quena. That day, Althouse also observed: "We sat around all day doing nothing—depending on Riega (some liar). Took down lab and set up in next room for band tomorrow morning (…) Left lab. 12:45AM."[50]

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[49] Victor Recording ledgers (Arequipa, August 8, 1917).

[50] Victor Recording ledgers (Arequipa, August 9, 1917, page 2, that is, on top of the August 10 page. A long recording day indeed!). The next month in Lima, on September 6, Althouse registered similar hiccups with a Mr. "Leon," probably from Lightner & Leon (in Buenos Aires). After noting that a piano that was supposed to be delivered was not going to come on time, Althouse complains that they were not aware of some of Leon's travels and moves and points out some complications in Leon's dealings with Victor. Then, apparently translating something he heard in Spanish, Althouse seems to want to make

It was not only about lining up reliable artists and setting up the recording equipment efficiently. Sometimes the scouts even had to figure out how to get the musicians in a suitable physical condition to perform. On October 23, 1917, for example, Cheney and Althouse were making recordings in Guayaquil, Ecuador—the last station in their prolonged transnational excursion of that year. They were expecting a "Band," seemingly one of the ensembles of either the Police or the Military, for a session that was supposed to begin at 8:00 a.m. Nevertheless, at 9:30 a.m. the scouts called the Band headquarters to report that out of the twenty-five men expected only ten showed up. They could not make the scheduled recording, but not only because of the lack of personnel. In the ledgers, the scouts wrote: "Holiday yesterday and the majority are intoxicated, Commander said." Both the musicians who did not show up—and the ones who did—were evidently drunk. Unable to play their instruments, they hung out in the studio, coping with their hangovers while the scouts scrounged up some food for them: "Had 100 B.B., large pot of soup, sandwiches, etc. ordered." That was not a good day for recording. Following this incident, the vocal duet of Anura García and Clara Hauston made some recordings that did not even go beyond the trial stage. After them, another music group came into the studio and performed so poorly that the scouts simply wrote: "Records by Orquesta: Started two records. Mistakes. Lost two blanks. Called date. Told [them] to practice."[51] Notwithstanding all these hurdles, Cheney and Althouse managed to make nearly 900 recordings throughout their traveling season of that year—from December 30, 1916 to November 22, 1917 when, after a

evident the way in which Leon was challenging the authority of Victor's representatives: "[Leon] [s]aid people look up to him more than the Exp. Dept. Called himself a tin God in the eyes of these peoples."

[51] Victor Recording ledgers (Guayaquil, October 23, 1917). See: Sergio Ospina Romero, "Talent Scouts, Drunk Musicians, and Other Recording Adventures in the Acoustic Era," *Musicology Now, American Musicological Society* (blog), March 6, 2018, http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2018/03/talent-scouts-drunk-musicians-and-other.html.

final six-day journey across the Caribbean with stops in Panama, Colombia, and Jamaica, they reached the New York harbor on board the steamship Turrialba.

Clues, symptoms, and traces of improvisation

Considering the scarcity of the available documentation about Victor's corporate operations in Latin America, the recording ledgers are apparently the only surviving vestiges of the scouts' traveling ventures. As such, the random annotations and technical minutiae included in these travelogues constitute traces of and clues into what happened during the tours. Digging into the historical configuration of the "conjectural or semiotic paradigm" that has informed the interpretative approach of a vast array of fields—including medicine, psychoanalysis, art history, criminology, and history—Carlo Gizburg writes: "[r]eality is opaque; but there are certain points—clues, signs—which allow us to decipher it (…) apparently negligible details can reveal deep and significant phenomena."[52] Indeed, regardless of how marginal, irrelevant, or trivial the details in the scouts' travelogues seem to be on first sight, they are symptoms of the cross-cultural and power dynamics as well as of the material arrangements that characterized the dawn of the music industry in Latin America.

Recording scouts were more than recording experts on tour. As they ventured overseas, they had to assume unpredictable roles. They acted as business representatives, legal advisors, cultural mediators, translators, vocal coaches, talent scouts, music producers, journalists, and even lobbyists. As the ledgers show, Frank Rambo, George Cheney, Charles Althouse, and the Sooy

[52] Carlo Ginzburg, "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method," *History Workshop*, no. 9 (April 1, 1980): 27–28.

brothers had to deal with a variety of copyright issues, distinguishing clearly between published and unpublished music, and specifying the terms of the agreement between Victor and each performer. This was evident, for example, in the discrimination of mechanical rights from other forms of commercial exploitation. Likewise, although they depended on the intermediation of people like Theodore Terry in Trinidad, Miguel Almeneiro in Lima, Jorge Rubiano in Bogotá, or even someone like Riega in Arequipa for recruiting performers and working out musical issues in the studio, they also participated in and engaged directly with local networks for the realization of the recordings.

In other words, the labor division by virtue of which there was a logistical distinction between the roles of a company representative, a music director, a local dealer/talent scout, and a recording expert was just apparent.[53] Not only were these roles not necessarily mutually exclusive but, more often than not, they were encapsulated in a single individual like Cheney or Althouse. Hence, it was not the case that recording scouts simply worked in isolation, behind windows or curtains, concealed along with their recording equipment. They were instrumental in the production of the commodity-record, from the scouting of artists to the marketing of the discs, as I will show later.

By the same token, it was not only their technical knowledge what was invested in the expeditions, but their cultural capital on the whole, their language skills, and their ability to interact and negotiate a myriad of issues with various sorts

[53] In both the acoustic and the electric eras, recording expeditions often entailed the pursuit of a local music director, "a product of the musical institutions of the colonial port" as Michael Denning writes, who was expected to help making musical arrangements and recruiting performers. One of the most famous music directors Victor hired for its activities in Brazil during the 1920s was the famous musician Pixinguinha. See: Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 83. In the United States, the fact of such musical directors were black reinforced segregation practices within the music industry such as the configuration of a special category of "race records." See: Denning, 83–85; Miller, *Segregating Sound*.

of peoples. Recording in either or both foreign languages and foreign lands entailed a significant challenge for recorders who did not speak the language or were unfamiliar with the culture or the music. The challenge was especially demanding when it was a matter of determining the entertaining quality of a comic performance, let alone understanding the joke—as with the comedian that Riega brought to the studio in Arequipa—or when identifying "indecent" or inappropriate content. "When Columbia engineers recorded the Cajun accordionist Dewey Segura in New Orleans in 1929," Pekka Gronow writes, "they told him, 'We don't know what you're singing, we ask you just one thing: don't sing anything dirty.'"[54]

As far as the writing in Victor's Latin American ledgers go, some of the scouts seem to have been somewhat proficient in Spanish and Portuguese. Althouse, again, is believed to have been fluent in Spanish. It is evident that having technical expertise was not enough for these scouts; for instance, in some pages of the ledgers they wrote various things in Spanish that they would need to remember on a regular basis, such as instructions for the performers while in front of the recording horn, multiple rows with conjugations of common verbs, and repetitions of a single sentence like, quite tellingly, "*Lo siento mucho*" ("I am sorry"). (Figures 7 and 8).[55]

[54] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 19.
[55] Victor Recording ledgers (1917). In chapter three, we will analyze some of the pages in the ledgers with instructions in Spanish for performers while recording.

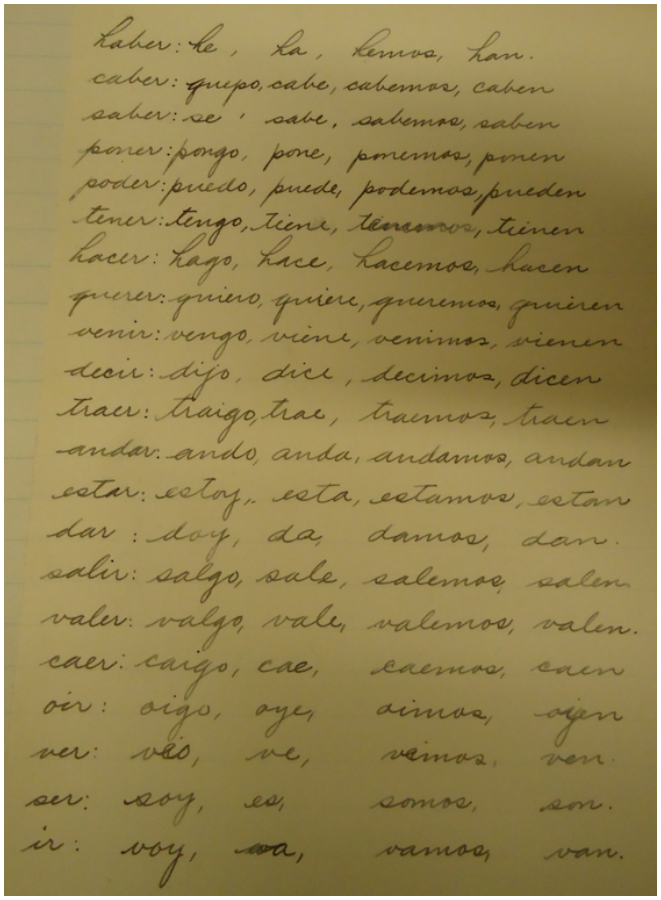
haber: he, ha, hemos, han.
caber: quepo, cabe, cabemos, caben
saber: se, sabe, sabemos, saben
poner: pongo, pone, ponemos, ponen
poder: puedo, puede, podemos, pueden
tener: tengo, tiene, tenemos, tienen
hacer: hago, hace, hacemos, hacen
querer: quiero, quiere, queremos, quieren
venir: vengo, viene, venimos, vienen
decir: dijo, dice, decimos, dicen
traer: traigo, trae, traemos, traen
andar: ando, anda, andamos, andan
estar: estoy, esta, estamos, estan
dar: doy, da, damos, dan.
salir: salgo, sale, salemos, salen
valer: valgo, vale, valemos, valen.
caer: caigo, cae, caemos, caen
oir: oigo, oye, oimos, oyen
ver: veo, ve, vimos, ven.
ser: soy, es, somos, son.
ir: voy, va, vamos, van.

Figure 7: Page from Victor's 1917 book of Recording Ledgers

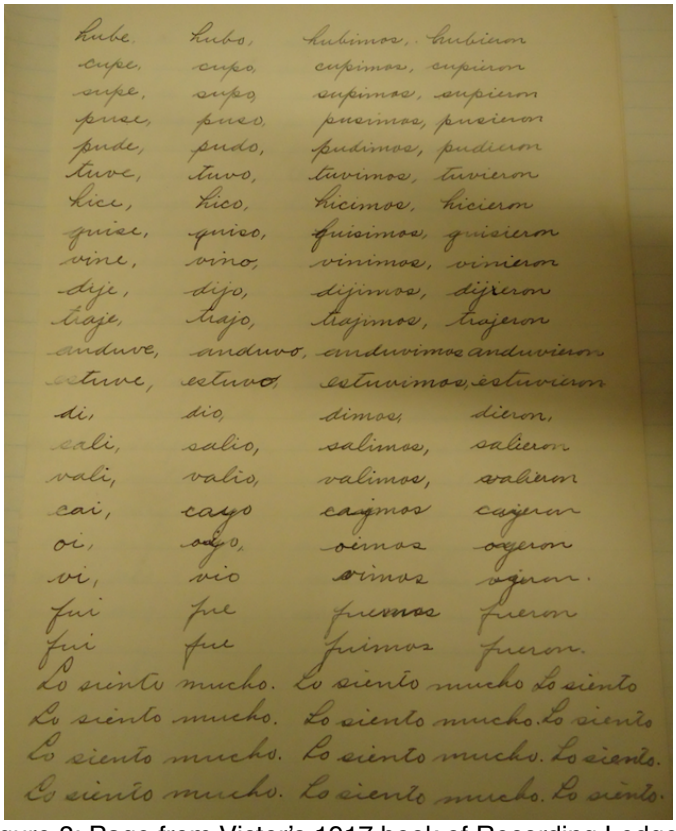
hube, hubo, hubimos, hubieron
cupe, cupo, cupimos, cupieron
supe, supo, supimos, supieron
puse, puso, pusimos, pusieron
pude, pudo, pudimos, pudieron
tuve, tuvo, tuvimos, tuvieron
hice, hico, hicimos, hicieron
quise, quico, quisimos, quisieron
vine, vino, vinimos, vinieron
dije, dijo, dijimos, dijeron
traje, trajo, trajmos, trajeron
anduve, anduvo, anduvimos anduvieron
estuve, estuvo, estuvimos, estuvieron
di, dio, dimos, dieron,
sali, salio, salimos, salieron
vali, valio, valimos, valieron
cai, cayo cajmos cajeron
oi, oyo, oimos oyeron
vi, vio vimos vieron.
fui fue fuemos fueron
fui fue fuimos fueron.
Lo siento mucho. Lo siento mucho Lo siento
Lo siento mucho. Lo siento mucho. Lo siento
Lo siento mucho. Lo siento mucho. Lo siento.
Lo siento mucho. Lo siento mucho. Lo siento.

Figure 8: Page from Victor's 1917 book of Recording Ledgers

It was not only about capturing sounds indiscriminately. Just as the recording agents in India quoted above in this chapter, Victor's scouts had to assume the role of aesthetic critics and assess the marketability of the music they were listening to. As much as it was a recording campaign, it was also a program of auditions through phonographic media. It demanded a detachment from their musical familiarity in order to procure new territories for the phonograph, while at the same time it imposed upon them with the task of adapting, inventing, or imagining descriptive categories. In light of similar recording ventures in the late 1920s, Michael Denning writes: "[as] producers and engineers knew little about the musics they were recording, they often regarded it as noise."[56] To a comparable degree, Victor scouts employed a fluid understanding of indigeneity to make sense of the different musics they found along the way, regardless of their historical, cultural, and musical particularities. Thus, Rambo and Althouse labeled the first recording they made in Lima—"Huaynito," [little huayno] a solo-guitar piece by Alejandro Gómez Morón—as "*baile indígena*" (indigenous dance). They probably chose that label based either on the description given by the performer, if any, on their own abstraction of what they heard in the music, or more likely, on a combination of both, but probably not in light of any kind of exploration or informed perspective about the *huayno* or other musics from the South American Andes. The ledgers for that day do not say much, except that they used a single horn to record Gómez Morón's guitar. Then, in an attempt to come to terms with the estrangement and sense of primitiveness they perceived in a *torbellino* performed by the Cuarteto Nacional in Bogotá, the same pair of scouts referred to it as "indian music." That

[56] Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 3.

the torbellino actually derives from eighteenth-century Spanish dances is beyond the point. It was the indigeneity of the music, as perceived by the scouts, what would inform its commercial configuration as simultaneously ethnic, foreign, and exotic.

Notwithstanding music's ubiquity, music is not a universal language. As Ian Cross writes, "[m]usics only make sense as musics if we can resonate with the histories, values, conventions, institutions, and technologies that enfold them; musics can only be approached through culturally situated acts of interpretation. Such interpretive acts (…) unveil a multiplicity of musical ontologies, some or most of which may be mutually irreconcilable: hence a multiplicity of 'musics.'"[57] Put another way, musics cannot transcend their own cultural boundaries as musics unless there is some kind of intercultural mediation. Amidst a myriad of mechanisms and agents, the operations of recording activities worldwide—exemplified in encounters like those of Rambo and Althouse with the huayno and the torbellino—also furthered the distorted transmission of musical ontologies across cultural borders. In this light, the global expansion of Victor's commercial empire, and by extension of recorded sound in general, entailed the configuration of networks that were not only international but also intercultural.[58]

For the scouts, the recording expeditions did not only entail the potential encounter with unfamiliar musics, whether or not pleasant to their ears. It was also the engagement in a cross-cultural journey in which almost anything could happen.

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[57] Ian Cross, "Music and Biocultural Evolution," in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17. See also: Cynthia Cohen, "Music: A Universal Language?," in *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics*, ed. Olivier Urbain (London: I.B Tauris, 2008), 26–39; Thomas Stanford, *La música: puntos de vista de un etnomusicólogo* (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Anáhuac del Sur S.C., 2009), 25–49.

[58] I am grateful for the insight provided by David Suisman in relation to these matters in his response to a paper that I presented at the 2018 meeting of the American Historical Association.

And considering the ample range of selections captured—from operatic renditions to all sorts of popular musics to recitations, comic sketches, and jokes—it was a journey of discovery in which almost anything could become a good-selling record. Furthermore, capturing local music numbers on wax implied the latent circulation of these recordings far beyond their local audiences and traditional performance venues. Yet, rather than allowing for the portability of all kinds of vernacular musics, the scouts' improvisatory interventions implied significant doses of arbitration in the globalizing ventures of the music industry. Who made it to the studio and what repertoires turned out to be massively disseminated depended on the aesthetic and acoustic judgment of the scouts, the frequently random selection of musical numbers, and the convoluted networks of local artistic circles that informed the organization of the recording sessions.[59]

Inasmuch as they functioned as performances of spontaneity, the scouts' improvisations were like musical and other kinds of improvisations. Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz have shown that, at the core, practices of musical improvisation are not different from those of social mobilization and community solidarity. They write,

> The term *improvisation* connotes artistic activities and practices that are spontaneous, personal, local, immediate, expressive, ephemeral, and even accidental (…) Improvisation is the creation and development of new, unexpected, and productive co-creative relations among people. It cultivates the capacity to discern elements of possibility, potential, hope, and promise where none are readily apparent. Improvisers work with the tools they have in the arenas that are open to them. Proceeding without a written score or script, they collaborate to envision and enact something new, to enrich their experience in the world by acting on it and changing it.[60]

Clearly, Althouse, Cheney, or the Sooy brothers were not engaged in any kind of social activism, as it was the case with the improvisatory activities of people like

[59] Ospina Romero, "Talent Scouts, Drunk Musicians."
[60] Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now*, xi-xii and back cover; see: 198, 231-243; See also: Born, Lewis, and Straw, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*.

Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, or Angela Davis, or the musical and social interventions of jazz musicians like John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Sonny Rollins, or Nina Simone.[61] If anything, it was entirely the opposite—as I will discuss in detail in chapter five; but the scout's improvisations in matters of language, technical procedures, marketing categories, or musical selectivity functioned pretty much within parameters of structured spontaneity strikingly similar to those of jazz improvisation.[62] Rather than random or indiscriminate arrangements, their off-the-cuff decisions and procedures were most of the time particularly intentional and even calculated, and rested on the basis of their knowledge and expertise in the affairs of the nascent music industry and the recording technology.

The scouts' improvisations in particular—and those of the recording industry at large—operated on the basis of the inconspicuous yet expanding force of the market empire, that is, the strategic accommodation to local scenarios for the sake of the health of consumer culture. In this respect, Stephen Greenblatt's notion of improvisation is illuminating. He writes, "by [*improvisation*] I mean the ability to both

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[61] Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now*, 28. In *Fantasies of Improvisation*, Dana Gooley shows that although improvisation fell out of practice as a musical live spectacle in classical music performances in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century, ideas and discourses of "improvisatoriness" survived and thrived in other cultural practices and in the realm of cultural representation. A "cluster of representations and meanings" surrounding improvisation was pervasive in the writings of a plethora of romantic authors as well as in the interplay between music and literature. Building upon the ideas of Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz, and the intellectual circle of the field of Critical Studies in Improvisation, Gooley points out that improvisation is "something much larger than music. It is a metaphor for the process of social formation itself, working towards progressive, democratic, and cooperative goals in a pluralistic world." (3-4). Yet, he argues that even if the social aspects and the utopian potential/dimension of improvisation was evident in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, it was grounded on the improvisation imaginary of the nineteenth century: "the vision of musical improvisation as a repository of social and ethical 'good'—a vision central to critical improvisation studies—is ultimately the product of the early nineteenth century, and owes its initial discursive development to literary romanticism." (5). See: Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 2–5, 16, 243–45, 280.

[62] In relation to matters of freedom, spontaneity, and structural design in musical (and especially jazz) improvisation, see: Nettle and Russell, *In the Course of Performance. Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*; Solis and Nettl, *Musical Improvisation*; Borgo, *Sync or Swarm*; Toop, *Into the Maelstrom*; Heller, *Loft Jazz*, 65–70, 86–93, 133–34.

capitalize on the unforeseen and transform given materials into one's own scenario. The 'spur of the moment' quality of improvisation is not as critical here as the opportunistic grasp of that which seems fixed and established."[63] Notwithstanding the perks of Victor's recording incursions for local musicians and entrepreneurs—or the musical and performative outcomes of the interactive improvisations of both scouts and musicians—these recording campaigns were grounded on unequal power relations as well as on (neo)colonial structures of domination. I will return to these issues on chapter five.

Sound recording was an extraordinary accomplishment that inspired money-making enterprises as soon as the first voices were successfully played back in tinfoil. However, what those commercial paths would be and what shape the companies would take in their global expansion were, as were acoustic recordings themselves, ventures of trial and error.[64] Even though recording companies deliberately reinvented the industry with their engagement with local musics in multiple parts of the world, as Karl Miller discusses, it was not really a predesigned process. In spite of certain expectations and preconceived arrangements, things hardly ever evolved according to any particular plan. To the contrary, improvisation and adaptation on the ground seemed to have been the rule. Just as the music and the performers, the conditions for recording in the various localities were unforeseen and so were the roles of the scouts, their interactions with local musicians, and the spur of the moment decisions that had to be made on behalf of the company. Successful trade came at the price of compromising. The extemporized nature of actions like changing steamships and the route in order to

[63] Greenblatt, "Improvisation and Power," 60; see: Chapman, *The Jazz Bubble*.
[64] See: Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*, 11.

include a new destination in a tour, bringing unknown personnel into the studio, or trying different horn combinations for the same ensemble in a single session—as I will examine in chapter three—are just symptoms and traces of a bigger picture.[65] To a significant extent, I argue, improvisation rules in the recording industry in the early twentieth century. Just like the improvisatory strategies of the scouts on the ground—or in tandem with them—the fulfillment of the industry's global ambitions depended on a permanent reconfiguration of business plans, technological devices, recording procedures, consumption patterns, cultural referents, and of the industry itself.

Unlike the recordings made in Camden, there were many variables in the production of the recordings during the tours that the heads of the company simply could not control. This, of course, led to multiple unexpected outcomes—or at least different versions of the expected outcomes. In other words, the improvisatory dynamics that characterized the expeditions were consequential with Victor's imperial agenda of international trade as discussed in chapter one, that is, the pursuit of a commercial monopoly in the global south within the milieu of consumption of phonograph commodities. However, the same dynamics were inconsequential in the long run with such agenda as the dissemination of recorded sound and recording procedures would eventually give way to the appropriation of the medium, the development of local industries, and practices of resistance against economic, political, and cultural imperialism—as we will see in chapters four and five.

[65] See: Ginzburg, "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes," 5–15; Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces: True, False, Fictive* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

One important question remains. How does considering the scouts' improvisations on the ground challenge top-down histories about the recording industry in which the labor of recording technicians is often invisible, and in which the agency of recording corporations, in abstraction, or of their executive heads is almost taken for granted as the primary factor for the global consolidation of the recorded sound business?[66] As I explored in chapter one, Victor's global expansion took place over the backdrop of imperial entanglements athwart the political and economic realms. Yet, it was not the tale of a company imposing things in abstraction but through the flesh and bone of people doing things to and with other people. It is nearly impossible to determine the extent to which Cheney, Rambo, or Althouse saw themselves as instrumental in the consolidation of Victor's empire or assumed the improvisatory character of their work. Unveiling the microhistories of their particular interventions in Latin America might be a way to disentangle the thicket of (neo)colonial interventions that propelled the globalization of recorded sound in the early twentieth century. Still, rather than merely illuminating other actors in the imperial game of metropolitan recording companies, it is an opportunity to question the supposedly all-powerful agency of those in power.

Recording experts were part of top-down power structures in light of their position as subordinate agents of multinational corporations with massive resources and political influence. Nevertheless, the very nature of their assignments implied a substantial degree of autonomy to act on behalf of the company. To begin with, they got to decide what was recorded and what not, out of a considerable pool of musical possibilities—or what I called above "a program of auditions through phonographic media." Even if other personnel in the company

[66] See references in note 7 of this chapter.

eventually took over the production of the records, such process was built upon the materials picked by the scouts and the way in which they mediated, in the first place, between local musics and their mass dissemination. Indeed, they were the ones shaping the repertoires that would eventually flood Victor's catalogs, constantly flipping around seemingly fixed categories like "foreign" and "ethnic" records, or even the "Black" and "Red" labels that Victor used to distinguish "lowbrow" popular music from its expensive stock of operatic artists.[67] Moreover, considering the frequent reference to the "recorders" in Victor's "Blue History Cards"—the forms used by the company to keep track of the incidents in a record's "life"—it is quite possible that they had a say when determining which and how many records were produced, and the potential commercialization of certain recordings in places other than those where they were originally made. In this light—and in light of the scouts' intermediation in matters of musical taste, aesthetic judgment, and genre-labeling as in the cases of the *huayno* in Peru or the *torbellino* in Colombia, discussed above—it might be reasonable to regard their interventions as forerunners of those of music producers in later decades.[68] I will get back to this point in chapter three.

Recording technicians were not isolated in their recording laboratories. As a matter of fact, Harry Sooy was a member of the Recording and Matrix Committee which, in his words, met "weekly for the purpose of reporting the work during the week, and also to discuss the mechanical problems which may arise pertaining to

[67] See chapter one of this dissertation and also: Suisman, *Selling Sounds*; Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*.
[68] See: Antoine Hennion, "An Intermediary between Production and Consumption: The Producer of Popular Music," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 14, no. 4 (1989): 400–424; Antoine Hennion, *The Passion for Music: A Sociology of Mediation*, trans. Margaret Rigaud (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).

the two departments."[69] It is not unlikely that they also discussed matters of commercial outreach, marketing categories, and records distribution. Likewise, as I explained at the beginning of chapter one, when examining Cheney's and Althouse's expedition to East Asia, Victor also used the scouts' stories, experiences, and trials overseas as marketing tools in themselves to publicize its records. As presented in the company's flamboyant report about Cheney's and Althouse's travels through China, Korea, and Japan, the scouts' labor and their improvisatory interactions for the sake of recording sound clearly added value to the collections of "foreign" and "ethnic" records produced from the expeditions and that the company hurried to include in its catalogs.[70] To be sure, the cosmopolitan capital of frequent voyagers like Cheney and Althouse—and along them that of William Nafey, Henry Hagen, William Linderman, Lewis Layton, and even Frank Rambo—was a valuable asset for Victor as well as an useful resource in its capitalist and imperial quests.[71]

Stationary dance steps, premature deaths, and drunk policemen

In *The Red-Headed League*, Sherlock Holmes meets with a Mr. Jabez Wilson; noticing the "questioning glances" on the part of Dr. Watson, his all-time sidekick in these detective adventures, Holmes says with evident irony: "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable

[69] Sooy, *Memoir of My Career*, 56.
[70] "La Compañia Victor ha grabado un magnifico repertorio en el Lejano Oriente. Impresiones de viaje. Interesante coleccion de preciosas fotografias sacadas por nuestros peritos grabadores." *La Voz de la Victor. Organo de propaganda de la Victor Talking Machine Co. Camden, NJ, E.U. de A*. Tomo II. No. 2. Junio (1916), 15-18.
[71] It would be interesting to compare the work dynamics of Victor's scouts in Latin America with the activities of other recorders and middlemen in industry such as Fred Gaisberg or Ralph Peer.

amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else." Struck by these sudden and unexpected revelations, the alluded Mr. Wilson could only utter: "How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes? (…) How did you know, for example, that I did manual labour. It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter." As calmly as usual, Sherlock Holmes replies: "Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed." Then, as Wilson wonders in stupefaction how he managed to figure out about the Freemasonry, his writing duties, and China, Holmes establishes, as if those conclusions were as evident to everyone as they were for him: "I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc-and-compass breastpin. (…) [As for the writing,] [w]hat else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk? (…) [Finally,] [t]he fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple."[72]

Holmes' wit and extraordinary interpretive skills aside, it is clear that while some clues in the historical record lead to straightforward conclusions, many others are far from being self-explanatory. The need to distinguish between foreign words that sound similar, like *poner* [to put] and *poder* [can] for their use at crucial moments during the sessions as well as the need to learn and practice the various

[72] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Electric Book Co., 2001), 44–45.

conjugations of verbs like *saber* [to know], *tener* [to have], *hacer* [to do], or *oir* [to hear] also decisive in their fulfillment of their recording missions, may explain why the scouts had all those practicing rows in the ledgers. And the same goes, probably, for an expression like "*Lo siento mucho*"—just as it would be the case with "*Gracias*" [thanks] or "*¿Dónde está el baño?*" [where is the restroom?] Nevertheless, it is much harder to make sense—or reconstruct or imagine—the episodes associated with vestiges such as the photograph of the South islanders apparently dancing hula to the music of a two-step blasting on Jack London's phonograph, the references to the premature deaths of Harry Sooy's child and Frank Rambo, or Althouse's annotations about drunken musicians in Ecuador.

It is possible that, as bizarre as it sounds, the islanders London met had actually danced with their "hula-hula" steps while listening to the two-step that was being played in the talking machine—what else but their own bodily knowledge of choreographed moves could they resort to under such circumstances? Yet, most likely it was a staged photograph, forged either or both through the pressure of the white visitor and/or the initiative of the native dancers. In any case, it was a whole new scenario for the music industry: a musical selection it had already managed to absorb into its technological and commercial web, but now listened and danced to—voluntarily or not—by a novel set of "consumers."

It was only about exporting phonograph goods, though. The photograph and the bizarre episode that it seems to conjure point out to another unprecedented scenario for the industry: the hula dance steps themselves were not part of the conventional repertoire of dance moves with which two-steps were danced to in the United States or elsewhere. That is, along with indigenous musics, foods, and lands, those dance steps were part of a universe of "exotic" cultural practices that

could be turned into a host of commodities—as was eventually the case. Not that people in U.S. cities were to begin dancing two-step as if hula dance, but stranger things have happened. More importantly, the traveling adventures of the recording industry were instrumental in turning intercultural differences across matters of embodied competency into capitalist practices of exoticism and cultural essentialism.[73] Briefly put, what began with London's travels of curiosity for the sake of finding new ideas for his writing endeavors, translated eventually into (or were already part of) systematic campaigns of extraction of natural resources and immaterial culture.

The death of Sooy's child—in circumstances totally unknown to us—and the drunken episode might be more challenging to retrace. It is hard to judge the motivations of the Victor company when sending Harry Sooy on an expedition right after the passing of his only son. By the tone of Sooy's memoirs, he seems to have taken it as a kind gesture from his employers; an opportunity to be away with his wife in order to cope with the grievance for their loss. Above in this chapter I suggested that such unexpected move, on the part of the company, was a symptom of the extemporaneous decisions and improvisations that characterized the recording expeditions. But there is more to it. Notwithstanding the company's good intentions, the situation portrays, to say the least, a poignant ethical quandary. Quite possibly, the trip was beneficial for the emotional and mental

[73] See Edward W Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003); Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*; Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College University Press of New England, 1997). In relation to the first argument, that of eventually turning the dancing natives into "consumers" of manufactured goods, I wonder if the marketing activities of the music industry function in a way, consciously or not, as the underground world of drug dealers: the first doses were seemingly free while the subsequent ones not much so. Jack London's visit, as publicized by Victor, might be considered a precursor of the "free samples," "free trials," "free downloads," and other enticing practices of the music business to this day.

health of the inconsolable parents; at the same time, it allowed Victor to send Harry Sooy, one of its most experienced recorders, on his first international expedition in a time when the company lacked enough qualified personnel to take such a task; it also allowed Victor to gather a considerable number of Cuban recordings at a moment when such materials were particularly scarce in the U.S., Cuba, and elsewhere.[74]

This conundrum, I believe, epitomized the concomitance of improvisation and capitalist convenience that informed the development of the early sound recording business. Indeed, as Naomi Klein has pointed out, capitalism not only does profit from scenarios of disaster and tragedy, but it thrives in conditions of uncertainty and upheaval.[75] As recording scouts made their way through unpredictable places, locations, peoples, and sounds, they contributed to the savaging enterprises of capitalism in general and Victor's colonizing ventures in particular. The same conundrum may also shed light on the outwardly generous gesture of Cheney and Althouse when they provided food for the incomplete orchestra of policemen (or soldiers) who showed up drunk that October morning at their makeshift studio in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

The power dynamics that informed the deployment of Harry Sooy to Cuba 1907 were somewhat replicated in the opportunistic generosity of the scouts towards those hungover musicians. As said above, it is not merely about these episodes but the extent to which these traces are also symptoms of the wider scenario of the music industry's globalization. The drunk musicians would

[74] The case of Frank Rambo's death might lead to similar conclusions, in spite of the different outcomes of the events. Victor apparently sponsored Rambo's time-off in New Mexico following the health issues he had after his travels in 1913, with the hope of getting him back for more expeditions later. But that never happened. He died in 1917.
[75] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007).

eventually recover, make their recordings, and continue their lives following the orders of their commander; and so would, in a way, Sooy, Cheney and Althouse—just as Jack London and the indigenous communities of the South Pacific he visited. The world of music and entertainment, however, would never be the same after the intervention of the nascent empires of the recording industry. I will consider in detail the extractive and colonial character of the recording expeditions in chapter five, after delving into the technological improvisations and some of the cultural implications of these voyages in the next two chapters.

3.

Acoustic Listening: The Making of Sound Recordings before 1925

Capturing and managing sound has been an ongoing venture for a long time. While sound-efficiency techniques—such as putting the hand in a cup-shape behind the ear or putting both hands over the mouth as a funnel—are probably as old as humanity, attempts to devise talking machines date back, at least, to the ancient Egyptian civilization.[1] Antique experimentation and fictional writing aside, the basic principles for sound recording and sound reproduction had been certainly around long before the invention of the phonograph. Not only did the work and ideas of theorists in acoustics and physics contribute significantly to the practicality of the inventors, but most of the eventual components of the phonograph were already available and functional in different machines and operations. These included the horn, the diaphragm, the stylus, the feeding screw, the wheel, and the moving

[1] As early as 1490 BC, the story goes, Egyptian architects managed to create the illusion that the Colossi of Memnon at Thebes were indeed talking, simply by means of air chambers that amplified the voice of someone speaking from inside the statues. Similarly, the Friar Roger Bacon is credited of having constructed a legendary talking automaton in the thirteenth century: a brazen (or bronze) head that, either by mechanical or magical means, depending on the source, could answer yes/no questions. Later on, in the late eighteenth century, Wolfang von Kempelen invented a "speaking" machine, in which an intricate mechanism of valves, ventricles, and bellows made a rubber funnel produce human-like sounds, including a good amount of words in Italian, French, and Latin. Kempelen used this machine in multiple spectacles to introduce his famous "chess automaton," which, unlike the mechanical complexity of the speaking machine, was found to be a hoax: a hunchback dwarf chess expert hidden inside a Turkish puppet. Along with mechanical experiments, sound reproduction machines were also imagined and featured in some literary pieces, including Cyrano de Bergerarc's mention of books "made wholly for the Ears, and not the Eyes" in his 1656 satiric proto science-fiction novel *A Voyage to the Moon*. See: Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*, 1; Todd Andrew Borlik, "'More than Art': Clockwork Automata, the Extemporizing Actor, and the Brazen Head in Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay," in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Wendy Beth Hyman (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 129–44; Thomas L Hankins and Robert Silverman, "Science since Babel: Graphs, Automatic Recording Devices, and the Universal Language of Instruments," in *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 113–47; Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Short Circuits (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), 5–10; Roger Moseley, *Keys to Play: Music as a Ludic Medium from Apollo to Nintendo* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 95–97, 159; Cyrano de Bergerac, *Histoire Comique Des États et Empires de La Lune, Trans. A Voyage to the Moon*, trans. Lovell Archibald (New York: Double Day, 1899), 195–97.

surface. In a way, Edison's ingenuity consisted in putting them together in the right way.[2] Moreover, the invention of the phonograph was contingent to and drew upon crucial developments in ear physiology, otology, listening perception, and communications, as Jonathan Sterne has shown.[3]

The move from the mouth to the ear had profound epistemic implications. The design and development of the phonograph was grounded on a radically new understanding of sound itself. Rather than conceiving it as a *cause* (being out there and being produced by a source such as the mouth), sound began to be conceptualized as an *effect*, that is, as something produced by perception via the tympanic function of the ear. Instead of taking sound for granted as something existing "out there," Hermann von Helmholtz understood it as vibrations decoded by the brain. Paradoxically, Sterne argues, even though sound-reproduction technologies like the ear phonautograph or the phonograph were assumed as writing and talking machines, they were, in the first place, "hearing machines," and

[2] Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*, 4–5. In fact Edison's original phonograph resembled in various ways the phonautograph, a machine devised in the mid-nineteenth century by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville for the graphic inscription of sounds in real time. Thus, Edison's primary innovation was to provide a way to playback the sounds. Welch writes: "the only knowledge lacking was how to indent waveforms of sound into an amorphous substance so that the process could be reversed by mechanical means." (5). Multiple authors have explored in detail the case of Scott's phonautograph. See for example: Thomas L Hankins and Robert Silverman, "Science since Babel: Graphs, Automatic Recording Devices, and the Universal Language of Instruments," in *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 113–47; Jonathan Sterne and Mitchell Akiyama, "The Recording That Never Wanted to Be Heard and Other Stories of Sonification," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 545–61; and J. Mackenzie Pierce, "Writing at the Speed of Sound: Music Stenography and Recording beyond the Phonograph," *19th-Century Music* 41, no. 2 (November 1, 2017): 121–50.

[3] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 31–39. According to Sterne, the ear took the lead as the main model for the eventual development of sound reproduction technologies in the nineteenth century. Instead of imitating the mouth—as in eighteenth-century automata—it was about mimicking the tympanic function of the ear. Bell and Blake's 1874 *ear* phonautograph was one of the most evident materializations of such a trend and a direct forerunner of the telephone, the phonograph, and other sounding devices. Modeled out of Leon Scott's 1857 phonautograph, the ear phonautograph used an actual human ear as the receiver; after speaking through that ear, the machine produced visual tracings of the sound on smoked glass. This machine operated, just as the phonograph would a few years later, on an unmistaken tympanic principle of transduction: they "turn audible vibrations into something else." While the ear phonautograph turned sound into visual tracings, the phonograph turned sound into grooves on wax and, eventually, it turned them back into sound when playing the grooves back.

as such, they worked as auditory surrogates—or machines to hear for us.[4] But it was precisely the tympanic mechanism of the phonograph, more than anything else, which allowed for the recording and reproduction of sound at will.

Recording sound in the acoustic era entailed a seemingly straightforward process. Briefly put, sound waves were channeled through a horn and made to vibrate a diaphragm which, in turn, caused a stylus to carve grooves on a moving surface, usually wax. For playing back, the process was reversed. The moving source made a stylus (usually a different needle) retrace the grooves, prompting the diaphragm to vibrate, the effect of which was the sound coming out of the horn. Just as in the human ear, sound, as reproduced by a phonograph, resulted from the vibration of a diaphragm. In spite of how simple it appeared to be in comparison to subsequent technological standards, acoustic recording was a very challenging enterprise and an area of work with only a handful of technical experts in the early twentieth century. By focusing on the labor of these recording experts and building on Sterne's argument about the significance of the ear for the development of early sound reproduction technologies, in this chapter I examine the tympanic and listening dispositions of the acoustic technology as well as of the recording technicians. While inquiring into the mechanics of acoustic recording in both stationary studios and itinerant scenarios, I demonstrate that rather than a rudimentary operation, making acoustic recordings was indeed a complex and sophisticated endeavor that demanded a specialized set of technical and listening skills.

Unfortunately, very little has been researched and written about acoustic recording; not only do many aspects of the process remain veiled, but implicit

[4] Sterne, 38, 61.

narratives of technological determinism—in which the apparent simplicity of the mechanism is assumed as an indicator of commercial marginality—are pervasive in many histories of the phonograph and the recording industry.[5] Building on the pioneering work of authors like George Brock-Nannestad, Peter Copeland, Patrick Feaster, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, Mark Katz, Susan Schmidt-Horning, and others, I scrutinize the material process of producing commercial records and the various challenges faced by recording experts in the acoustic era—with the aim of offering a more accurate picture of the stakes of the technology within the contours of the industry. In relation to traveling recording ventures in particular, I focus on the expeditions set by the Victor Talking Machine Company across Latin America in the 1910s. While surveying some of the material challenges posed by the equipment, I argue that recording standards were continually changing in light of technology affordances and the interventions of the recording experts. This panorama of changing standards, or what I call non-standard standards, was heightened by the unforeseeable conditions encountered by traveling agents in the course of the tours. At the same time, it highlights the significance of the activities of recording experts for the consolidation and expansion of the recording business in the early twentieth century. The rest of this chapter is divided in four sections. Following a discussion around the meanings and implications behind the notion of "phonography," in the next two sections I study the technical procedures and challenges of acoustic recording—in relation to both stationary and nomadic recording laboratories and from the point of view of the discs manufactured by

[5] See, for example: Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," 7–11; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Chanan, *Repeated Takes*; Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*; Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*; Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 263; Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 67–68, 86–87.

Victor. At the end of the chapter I return to the ear, not so much to underscore its importance as a model for the development of recording machines, as Sterne does, but to consider the way in which recording experts developed their craft by ear and, in doing so, operated under a different regime of acoustic listening.

On Phonography

We tend to think of phonography as a recent development pertaining exclusively to the realm of sound recording. Nonetheless, as Patrick Feaster shows, not only had the term and the idea been around for a long time before the advent of sound reproduction technologies, but the phonograph itself constituted a late stage in phonography. Before and after the nineteenth century, "phonography" referred to a variety of projects around the writing of sound, including practices of inscription according to arbitrary codes and conventions (i.e. pictograms, alphabetic writing, transcriptions of noises, musical notation, stenography, etc.) as well as the inscription of sound waves on enduring materials such as paper (phonautograph), tinfoil, wax, shellac, vinyl (phonographs and gramophones), or digital media. Thus, phonography constitutes a means of sonic inscription and aural mediation between a sound event (production) and its re-production.[6] In regard to phonography within the arena of sound reproduction technologies, Adorno argued that phonograph recording constituted a non-arbitrary system of writing, an idea that somewhat echoed Leon Scott's claim that his phonautograph allowed for the writing of nature.[7] Still, Adorno was reluctant to accept the sounds coming from the phonograph as music or as any resemblance of live music performances. At most,

[6] Patrick Feaster, "Phonography," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 139–40.
[7] Feaster, 143; Pierce, "Writing at the Speed of Sound," 144.

Adorno insisted, those mechanical sounds were an artifice, an illusion of the real thing. Thus, in his view, the relevance of the phonograph was "debatable," not only because it constituted a threat to what he considered good musical manners (that is, live music), but also because the mechanicity of the phonograph implied a reduction in fidelity and transmission. The phonograph's "mechanically fractured" sounds, he wrote, made evident that "the historical limits of the talking machines are inscribed upon them."[8] Nevertheless, unlike the predictions and prejudices of the famous German philosopher, the sounds emitted by the phonograph and subsequent sound reproduction technologies kept gaining cultural legitimacy as the years went by.[9]

More recently, Rothenbuhler and Peters defined the analog inscription and physical embodiment of waveforms in phonograph records in contrast to the arbitrary symbolism of ones and zeroes in digital recording. These authors described phonography as "a period in our relation to music (...) marked by a distinct set of attitudes, practices, and institutions made possible by a particular technology, the phonograph."[10] As live performers were no longer indispensable to get access to musical sounds, "[m]usic took a life on its own," reified as a tangible and purchasable object: the record.[11] Pre-phonographic performances were attached to the singularity of music events in time. Phonography implied not only the repetition and control of that time and the portability of music listening, but also

[8] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," *October* 55 (1990): 50, 54; Theodor W. Adorno, "The Form of the Phonograph Record," *October* 55 (1990): 56–61. Adorno also decried the phonograph as he considered it might well be a technology of ideological fixation. In that light, he famously pointed out a resemblance between the form of the phonograph record (the spinning disc) and the social conformity ensued by mechanical reproduction.
[9] See: Sterne, *MP3*.
[10] Eric W. Rothenbuhler and John Durham Peters, "Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory," *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (1997): 242.
[11] Rothenbuhler and Peters, 243.

an unprecedented separation between the instances of music production and music consumption.[12] With the phonograph, they write, music "became disembodied" as the machine allowed for the storage and reproduction of sounds and voices "no longer tied to the human body or to the organic cycle of birth and death," so that by means of recordings, the voice was somewhat "fixed in a state of suspended animation."[13] Few images capture the novelty and uncanniness of such experience as luridly as Francis Barraud's painting of his dog Nipper listening to "His Master's Voice,"—which would eventually become the trademark logo of the Victor Talking Machine Company. However, assuming that the disembodied character of recorded sound entailed its independence from "the organic cycle of birth and death," or its control in/through the recorded material, is an oversimplification—to say the least. Rather, as Stanyek and Piekut have shown, phonography also provided the condition of possibility for projects of intermundane collaboration. The interaction between "dead" and live performers by virtue of the overdubbing and multi-tracking possibilities of sound recording challenges the supposed lack of agency of dead people—and thereby the supposed fixation of their recorded voices "in a state of suspended animation." Phonography, in this light, reveals that agency is not merely an act of "here and now" but also past actions—or recorded performances—may have future effects—or performative iterations—via the reproducibility of the recording.[14] I will return to the issue of the performativity and indexicality of sound recordings in chapter four.

[12] Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 5–6.
[13] Rothenbuhler and Peters, "Defining Phonography," 245.
[14] Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54, no. 1 (2010): 18.

Recorded sound has affected and deeply influenced the way in which music is listened to, performed, or even composed—as Arved Ashby has shown.[15] One of the most pervasive examples is, perhaps, the long-lasting legacy of the three-minute standard pop song. Such "phonographic effects," as Mark Katz calls them, were propelled by the unique features of recorded sound, including its tangibility, portability, invisibility, repeatability, temporality, receptivity —or the technology's capacity to capture sound— and manipulativity.[16] Phonographic effects, however, do not imply a technological determinism over music consumption or music making. Katz also shows that different people and different societies have reacted differently to the same technology. For instance, while the circulation of magnetic tapes in India furthered a move against the aesthetic standardization of popular music, in Bali the same technology facilitated the standardization of fixed performance patterns as musicians began to follow closely the recordings of reputed Gamelan Ensembles.[17] Furthermore, it is not only about the way in which the technology has influenced musicking habits but also how musical practices have shaped the technology itself, by virtue of musical, cultural, and material adaptations of various kinds. As I will examine later in this chapter, the activities of recording experts during the acoustic era make apparent the way in which both recorded sound and the recording industry were developed as the result of the interactivity of the human and the non-human.

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[15] Arved Mark Ashby, *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[16] Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 10–55, 108. Katz offers a series of case studies that highlight particularly significant phonographic effects across the twentieth century, including the exaggeration of vibrato in string players, the preference of certain instruments over others and the transformation of recorded mistakes into new melodic and harmonic standards in jazz performances, the use of recording technologies as compositional tools, the rise of turntablism, and digital sampling.
[17] Katz, 16–17.

While digital recording operates on the basis of the storage of numbers as data, analog technologies (including phonograph records and magnetic tapes) keep "physical traces of the music" —with the grooves even visible and tangible.[18] Rothenbuhler and Peters write: "[t]he analog recording is an index of music because it is physically caused by it. The digital recording is a symbol of music because the relation is one of convention."[19] In other words, while phonography implies a "conformity with the laws of nature," in resonance with Adorno and Scott's claims, digital recording is the result of an arbitrary convention—the corporate agreement between Sony and Phillips for the codification of sound signals in patterns of ones and zeroes.[20] Notwithstanding this distinction, acoustic recordings ought not to be understood as faithful representations of reality nor as more authentic renditions of natural sounding phenomena. Rather than a transparent arena of sound inscription or sound preservation, phonography often takes the form of a creative art. As I will discuss more extensively in chapter four, the intervention and mediation of the technology—as well as of the human beings operating the technology—entail significant doses of manipulation over the sounding acts being recorded. Just like a photograph is not a transparent rendition of a visual reality, sound recordings are constituted as such on the basis of the transformation of sound for the sake of its reproducibility.[21]

[18] Rothenbuhler and Peters, "Defining Phonography," 245, 246.
[19] Rothenbuhler and Peters, 249.
[20] Rothenbuhler and Peters, 249, 250.
[21] Feaster, "Phonography," 145–47.

Making Records in the Acoustic Era

The so-called acoustic era extends for almost half a century, from 1877—when Edison succeeded in playing back sound in tinfoil—to the incorporation of electric recording in 1925. Evidently, various technical aspects changed significantly over that period. To begin with, before the end of the phonograph's first decade, wax had already taken the place of tinfoil as the preferred recording material. This implied that grooves were now achieved by cutting rather than indenting, and also, it led to the incorporation of treadles, spring motors, and other artifacts to ease the rotation of the cylinder instead of Edison's original hand-crank device. In the course of a few years, before the turn of the century, subsequent improvements were made to the machine and significant transformations took place in terms of the recording mechanism, the individual components of the assemblage, the duplication process and, more strikingly, the nature of the grooves' keeper—a cylinder or a disc. The dynamic pace of these changes continued to be manifest, among other things, in countless battles over patents, the escalating competition between recording companies for higher recording standards, and the unremitting reformation of those standards in light of the assiduous experimentation of recording technicians—or "recording experts" as they were known at the time.[22]

To be sure, as Susan Schmidt Horning and others have shown, both recording procedures and the sound quality of the records were continually refined and improved throughout the acoustic period by means of trial and error. Such customary exercises included experiments with the various components of the equipment, the physical conditions of the recording studios, the placement of the

[22] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis," 6–7.; Peter Copeland, *Sound Recordings* (London: British Library, 1991), 7–8; See: Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*.

performers, and other imaginable variables in an emerging professional field in which science and art were frequently intertwined. Thus, the higher stakes of secrecy among those tinkering with the technology and between the recording companies they worked for come as no surprise.[23] Nevertheless, as much as recording experts were personally invested in some kind of *ad hoc* research agenda for the betterment of their craft, more often than not the urge for their experimentation came from mandatory routines of quality control demanded by their employers. The ledgers filled by recording scouts of the Victor Talking Machine Company during their tours across Latin America include frequent annotations about trials and tests before running the recording sessions, which resemble the testimony of several musicians making recordings in the U.S. during the same period.[24] Whether inspired by technical curiosity or required by corporate stipulations, these patterns of experimentation played a crucial role in the constant rectification of recording standards during the acoustic era.

On the other hand, however, some technical aspects remained almost entirely unaltered throughout the long-time span of the acoustic period. The most unmistakable was, of course, the acoustic nature of the whole operation. "In acoustic recording," Feaster writes, "the palpable mechanical force of the sound vibrations themselves drives the movement of the recording stylus."[25] Because sound waves, as produced by the performers, constituted the essential energy for the activation of the recording mechanism, the material arrangements prioritized an efficient transmission of those waves through the equipment. Therefore, the ideal

[23] Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*, 11–15; Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," 10.
[24] Recording Ledgers of the Victor Talking Machine Company (SONY Archives, UCSB); see: John. Harvith and Susan Edwards. Harvith, eds., *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).
[25] Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 49.

placement for a performer was usually right in front of the horn's mouth. However, more often than not, there were various performers in a single ensemble and multi-tracking, obviously, was not an option. Everything needed to be captured and balanced at the same time, in real time. For this matter, musicians were placed either as a single group in relation to the horn or, more frequently, at different positions around, behind, or beneath the main performer, who was located in front of the horn. In either case, the relative position of the sound-producing source in relation to the horn determined its prominence in the mix. Hence, the main function of the horn was to concentrate and channel the sound. As we will see later, quite often various horns were used simultaneously, connected at their smaller ends by means of metal tubes, acoustic cavities, and other creative artifacts. Horns facilitated the transmission of sound waves toward a small unit known as the "soundbox," which sheltered, among other tiny items, a thin diaphragm, usually made of glass, metal, or other materials. The sound pressure caused the vibration of the diaphragm. As the movement was more intense at the center of the diaphragm, this was the preferred point for the connection to a lever system which, ultimately, transmitted the sound vibrations onto the cutting stylus. As the final receptacle of the flow of sound energy, the contact of this cutting tool with the rotating surface of a cylinder or a disc caused the carving of a sustained trail of sound grooves on wax. By virtue of this operation, granted not a substantial sound-energy loss or corruption in the transmission, the invisible sound waves—as originally produced by the musicians—turned into a tangible and observable pattern inscribed in a solid and durable material. The successful fulfillment of such

an act of transduction made possible the eventual reproduction at will of those otherwise ephemeral sounds.[26]

The experts' experimentations revolved not only around the materiality of the mechanism but in relation to the interaction of the live sounds with the recording equipment. Henceforth, during the acoustic era, the sounds and the music put on record were pretty much determined by the possibilities and limitations of the technology. As early as in 1878, William Preece highlighted specific capturing issues in relation to the sound of certain consonants, in the context of phonographic letters: "The *s* for instance at the beginning and end of a word is almost entirely lost (…) although it is heard slightly in the middle of a word. The *d* and the *t* are exactly the same; and the same in *m* and *n*, *mane* and *name* are not distinguishable."[27] In spite of some improvements in the capturing ability of the machine and various interventions in vocal delivery in front of the horn, such complications continued to be prominent during the acoustic period. As the recording pioneer Fred Gaisberg put it in a small footnote in his memoirs, "[s]ibilants remained strangers to the gramophone record until the introduction of the electrical recording process in 1925."[28] Things were not any easier when dealing with the timbres and frequencies of musical instruments. Flutes and brass instruments were usually captured very well but that was not always the case with violins or pianos. Some stringed low-frequency instruments, like cellos or double

[26] Peter Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques* (London: The British Library, 2008), 251–52; Peter Copeland, *Sound Recordings* (London: British Library, 1991), 7–17; Eric Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," 10; Andre J. Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, 2nd ed (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 115–24; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis for the Production of High Quality Transfers from Pre-1925 Sound Recordings"; Susan Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*, 11–19; Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 263–64.; Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraphs 13-18.
[27] W. H. Preece, "The Phonograph," *Journal of the Society of Arts*, May 10, 1878, quoted in Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 49.
[28] Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round*, 9. Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 50.

basses, could almost never be captured at all. As Andre Millard writes: "[l]oud sounds or deep bass notes forced the stylus to the edge of the groove and sometimes beyond it, ruining the recording. Drums were therefore excluded from recording studios, and technicians always waited with nervous anticipation as singers reached for the climactic high notes. Too loud a recording made the diaphragm vibrate rapidly, causing 'blasting' on the playback, which distorted the sound."[29]

Of all the instruments, one recording expert insisted in 1903, the cornet was one of the easiest to capture, granted the use of a thick diaphragm, unlike the banjo which sound could also be picked up very well by the machine but demanded a much thinner diaphragm. Recording a trombone was just like recording a cornet, except that it was advisable to have, if possible, a slightly thinner diaphragm and to keep the performer further from the recording horn. Clarinets were challenging. It was a good practice to have the performer somewhat raised so that the bell of the instrument was set right below the recording horn. Still, clarinet recordings had, he wrote, "a tendency to blast, especially the low or bell notes, but by carefully arranging the position of the instrument this can be avoided, and these splendid notes can be recorded in all their full richness."[30] Flutes and piccolos were usually very straightforward to capture although, as the same writer remarked, it was important to keep the musician "about six inches from the horn, and his instrument on a level with its opening. If the records have a windy sound the player is too near. Place him farther back, and a good clear crisp record should result."[31]

[29] Millard, *America on Record*, 80.
[30] "Record Making II. Taking Instrumental Records," *Talking Machine News* (August 1903): 58.
[31] "Taking Instrumental Records," 58.

In most cases, a long, conical, and not too wide horn was ideal—"26-inch long, six inches across the bell, tapering regularly, made of No. 4 tin."[32] Almost an identical horn, but 2 inches shorter, seemed to have been regularly used in the early 1900s for voices. Along with the horns, tests with different diaphragms were in place depending on "the strength and penetrating quality of the voice" as well as sound tests to determine the distance between the singer and the horn—although three to four inches was for many the rule of thumb.[33] For brass instruments and banjos, granted the use of different diaphragms in each case, the 26-inch length was also appropriate but a bigger mouth, of at least 12 inches in diameter, was expected to work better. Before the end of the first decade of the century, horns up to almost 40 inches in length were already being used to record brass bands and diverse orchestras. As for violins, as hard as it was to obtain satisfactory results, for a time it was a great aid to have long and narrow fiber horns—34 inches long and 6 inches across the mouth. "Place the recording instrument high up," the same expert advised, "so that the horn will have a gentle drop, and the large end will be over the artiste's violin."[34] Notwithstanding the confirmed efficacy of certain horns for certain jobs, recording experts at metropolitan studios had at their disposal a multiplicity of horns of different dimensions and shapes to experiment with. One recording room at Edison's laboratory was said to have, at some point around 1905, "forests of horns, ranging in length from a few inches to eighteen feet."[35]

Pianos presented a very particular set of problems. Not only the regular directionality and concentration of their sound seemed to be almost incongruous

[32] "Record Making I. Mechanical Appliances," *Talking Machine News* (July 1903): 37.
[33] "Record Making IV. Vocal Records," *Talking Machine News* (October 1903): 100.
[34] "Taking Instrumental Records," 58.
[35] Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 156.

with the capturing disposition of the horn, but the ample frequency range of the pianos and a pianist's expressive playing constituted critical challenges for both recording experts and their equipment. Although grand pianos began to be recorded with certain success since the 1910s, for the most part, upright pianos were the preferred alternative throughout the acoustic era. Recording a grand piano implied using, almost inevitably, angled or L-shaped horns, which caused more reflection and concentration of sound on top of a mostly inefficient transmission of sound waves. Not to mention how cumbersome it was to have a grand piano in the recording room, amidst other crowded musicians. With upright pianos, it was fairly common to elevate the instrument on a platform and remove the back post so that a straight horn could point directly into the soundboard—sometimes with the head of a singer in between the horn and the pianos' soundboard. Playing with dynamics was usually out of the question. Quite often pianists were requested to play forte throughout and without using the sustain pedal at all.[36] Other arrangements for the disposition of singers and pianists were certainly available. The same recording expert mentioned above advised the readers of *Talking Machine News* to try the following:

> Place the piano to one side of the recording horn, with the treble notes about one foot away. Swing the instrument around so that the bass notes are behind the singer on his right. The accompanist should play rather more forcibly than for a drawing-room rendition. As played for record making, the accompaniment is not so subordinate as in "real life," because the sounds of the instrument are diffused while the singer's are concentrated in front of the horn. Therefore, to bear its true relation to the voice when the record is reproduced, the accompaniment must be played with more determination than under ordinary circumstances. Yet avoid the other extreme of overdoing it. Never use the loud or the soft pedal. If the accompaniment is

[36] Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, 27–28; Copeland, *Sound Recordings*, 12–15.

> played an octave higher than it is written, it will come out much clearer and brighter.[37]

Interestingly enough, the idea of "real life" here—to account for a live performance—underscores the very act of forgery that presupposed a recording session. Rather than pursuing a thorough representation of a musical instance all throughout the recorded performance and its reproduction, it was about making things up in the studio so that by means of such falsification the resulting record could be taken as a credible representation of a given (or imagined) musical reality. In spite of the seemingly straightforward and natural transmission of soundwaves across the recording equipment, the making of acoustic records were like crafting make-believe acts—an issue I will address also in chapter four. As a matter of fact, one of the most common reactions of singers when hearing their voices played back in a phonograph was one of misidentification and denial. Just as it took almost a leap of faith for the first witnesses (and listeners) of phonographic renditions to accept that those sounds had been originally produced by a real group of musicians, many singers and performers had a hard time believing that the sounds they produced in front of the horn could come out so differently in the recording.[38] In that light, the interventions of recording experts were the more crucial as to be able to anticipate the result of a given interpretation in the studio and work out the necessary adaptations in order to prevent or manipulate, if needed be, that potential outcome.

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[37] "Vocal Records," 100

[38] See: Katz, "Sound Recording. Introduction," 11–12, 24–25. Yvonne de Treville, "Making a Phonograph Record." *Musician* (November 1916): 658, reproduced in Taylor, Katz, and Grajeda, (eds.) *Music, Sound, and Technology in America,* 85-88.

These interventions were often made on the instruments themselves. One of the most famous examples is that of the "Stroh violin," named after Augustus Stroh, who invented it in 1899. In order to amplify the sound of the violin, especially its higher frequencies, Stroh violins had a small horn with a diaphragm attached to the body of the instrument—or in lieu of a good portion of the violin's body. Some models had an additional, smaller horn pointing to the player's ear as a way to help him hear himself amidst the noisy environment of recording rooms.[39] However, as much as these devices helped improved the clarity, volume, and directionality of the sound, string players had to exaggerate the use of vibrato.[40] Other common interventions included using bass brass instruments, like the tuba, instead of bass string instruments, the constant relocation of performers in relation to the horn—sometimes during the same piece—, and the use of a harder material than felt for the piano's hammers due to the "diaphragm's insensitivity to transient sounds."[41] Furthermore, although different kinds of diaphragms proved to perform better with different instruments, recording experts had to use the best of their judgement picking a single diaphragm when recording multiple instruments at the same time—as it was usually the case.

The recording material, the rotating speed, and the capturing mechanism were other important variables of consideration and potential areas for experimentation and intervention. Although wax was the fundamental material for the blank masters, the specific components of the mixture to make the disc tablets or the cylinders varied as well as the temperature range of the wax when having

[39] Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 25; Schicke, *Revolution in Sound*, 72; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*, 62–63.
[40] Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 94–106.
[41] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 252–53; See also: Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 155–81.

the stylus cutting through it. Likewise, the actual recording speed is, in most cases, unknown. In theory, turntables rotated at 78 revolutions per minute, but in practice the speed fluctuated between trying to stay around the 78 RPM zone and having some "takes" as fast as at 160 RPM.[42] For some time, in the earliest days of the recording industry, sound was captured by means of speaking tubes, but even after recording horns took over as the preferred tool, some experts continued to have hybrids of horns and rubber tubes in order to control the resonance. In spite of the transmission efficiency of conical horns, many other shapes were available.[43] And although the primary way to get more sound was to ask the performers to play louder or bring them closer to the horn, attempts were made—most of them unsuccessful—to achieve artificial amplification. One of the most ingenious procedures involved pneumatic amplification by means of an "auxetophone," that is, "a reproducing phonograph whose soundbox was replaced by a valve mechanism fed by compressed air."[44] By virtue of such intervention, the records played on the auxetophone were much louder than if played in a regular phonograph. Commercialized with some success by Victor as a blasting playback machine, the auxetophone was also used in the studio to play a regularly recorded matrix while recording it again using a conventional recording machine. The resulting recordings were reported to "sound almost identical to the original, except louder."[45] Nevertheless, in spite of the apparent effectiveness of this method it was

[42] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis," 2; Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 14. "Record Making II. Taking Instrumental Records," *Talking Machine News* (August 1903): 58.
[43] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 272.
[44] Copeland, 274.
[45] Copeland, 274. On the commercial figuration of the Auxetophone in Victor's marketing ventures, see chapters one and five as well as Barnum, *"His Master's Voice" in America*, 40. On the Auxetophone, see also: *The Voice of the Victor*, Vol. I, No. 3, July (1906), 2; Vol. I, No. 4, September (1906), 1 and 6; Vol.

hardly ever used by recording companies. Similarly, although carbon microphones had been already developed for the telephone, they were essentially useless for acoustic recording as they did not really amplify the sound signal.[46] In short, before the advent of electric recording, horns seem to have been the best available tool for capturing sound. Or at least, that was the conclusion of the first generation of recording experts after (or while) trying with other alternatives.

Recording studios—or laboratories as they were called at the time—were peculiar places. They were usually set at the top of the companies' buildings as a way to keep external or "foreign" noises away but also in consideration of the excessive loudness that was commonly requested from the performers. Being at the top of the buildings allowed the laboratories to have skylights, which was useful to control the perspiration and was believed to reduce the anxiety of the musicians. Still, in order to guarantee the proper operation of the cutting needle, the blank masters needed to reach a certain temperature so that ovens or heating devices were a common presence in the studio, making it a difficult place to be with clothes on. The word *laboratory* was meant to emphasize more the "scientific" than the "artistic" nature of the activities that took place in those isolated and boisterous rooms.[47] Laboratories were often split in two adjacent rooms, one for the recording equipment and another for the performers, with the horns breaching through the wall from one room into the other. Musicians or anyone other than the recording experts were hardly ever allowed into the recording room, which heightened the aura of secrecy and concealment that surrounded the entire operation. Performers

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I, No. 5, November (1906), 6; Vol. II, No. 1, January (1907), 6; Vol. II, No. 3, May (1907), 7; Vol. II, No. 6, November (1907), 8.

[46] Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," 10.

[47] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 250; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*, 113.

had to comply with the layout set by the experts, which often implied odd arrangements like crowding musicians in group dispositions otherwise unthinkable for a musical performance or, as mentioned above, elevating instruments on platforms, manipulating musical instruments, and moving people back and forth from the horn in order to keep the balance, change the volume, alter the dynamics, or simply improve the mix.[48]

Stories, layouts, and photographs abound illustrating how clustered musicians had to be in the studios.[49] Although such accommodations made perfect sense in light of the capturing limitations of the technology, that was not always the case. Not only did recording experts try with manifold arrangements based on the directionality and reverberation of sound waves but, more often than not, they used multiple horns at the same time to capture sound more efficiently, which made the rooms less congested.

When Fred Gaisberg visited the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1907, he wrote: "In placing the men for orchestral accompaniments the men are never crowded up against the horn, but loosely placed with ample room and at safe distances."[50] Along with his written report Gaisberg included a drawing of such layout, showing three horns protruding into the recording room towards an orchestra of eleven performers, at considerable distance from each other. Two 24-inch horns on each side point respectively to the flute, and to the oboe, second violin and viola. A bigger, 40-inch horn at center points to four rows of instruments: a) tuba, first violin, and first clarinet; b) 2 clarinet (right behind the first clarinet); c)

[48] Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 155. Katz, "Sound Recording. Introduction," 23–26.
[49] Several references and anecdotes about the accomodations of musicians on the studio can be found in Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*; Harvith and Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph*; Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*; Millard, *America on Record*; Taylor, Katz, and Grajeda, *Music, Sound, and Technology in America*.
[50] Quoted by Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis," 7.

first and second cornet; and d) trombone (behind and in between the cornets). In spite of being in the first row, the tuba is significantly pushed to one side while the violin stays at the center, in front of the big horn but not too close, though. Although the viola is in the area covered by one of the small horns, it is also very close to the side of the big horn. Both the viola and the violin are Stroh's instruments (Figure 9).[51]

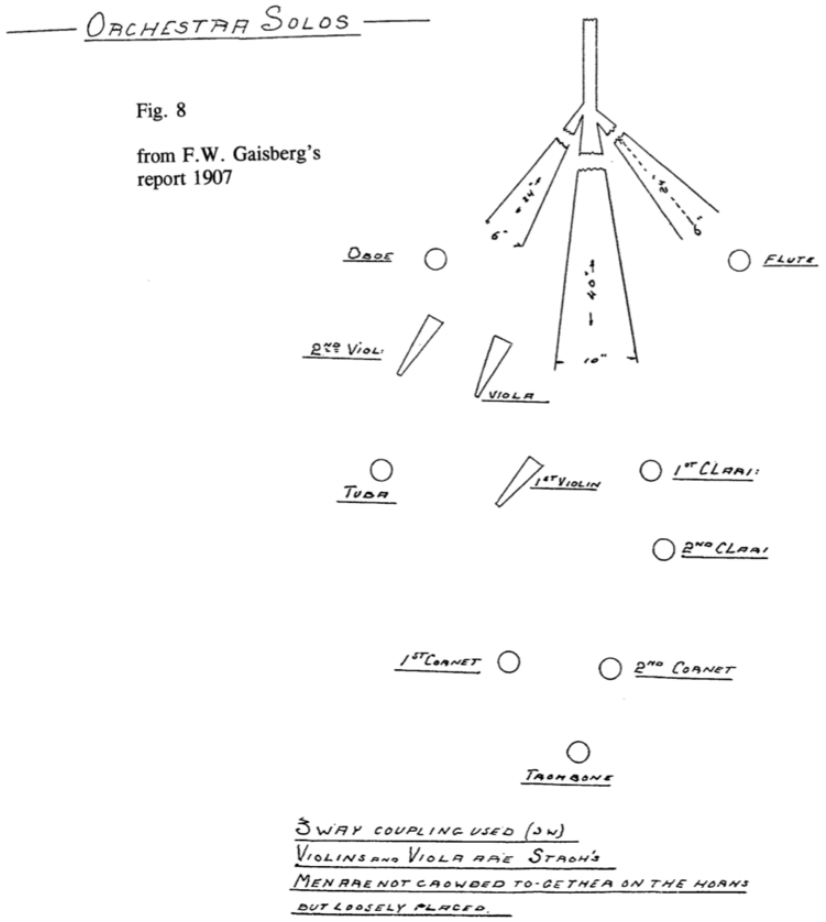

Figure 9: Layout of Victor's recording room in Camden, NJ in Fred Gaisberg 1907 report to the Gramophone Co. Published in Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis for the Production of High Quality Transfers," [Figure 8]

[51] Brock-Nannestad, Figure 8.

The dimensions of the room were a key factor for such spatial disposition. According to Andre Millard, Victor's studio at Camden was 22 feet long, 16 feet wide, and 11 feet and 6 inches high.[52] Nevertheless, large orchestras and ensembles inevitably implied crowding and piling up musicians in the same space. As it is evident in some layouts, sketches, and instruments lists, up to 33 performers—or even more—could be accommodated in the same room for a single recording session (Figure 10).[53]

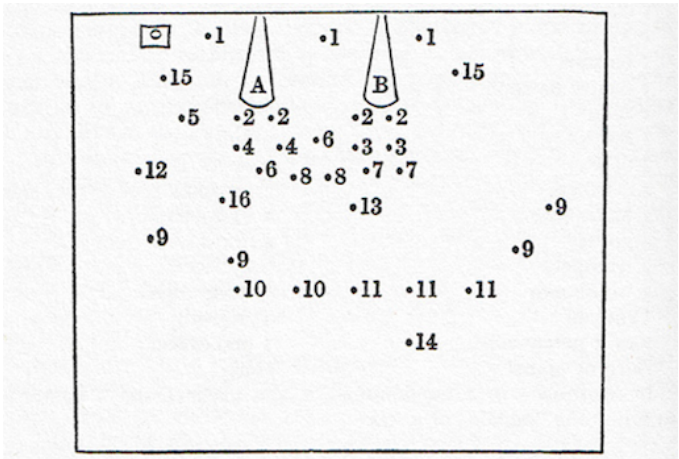

Figure 10: Layout of recording room for an orchestra with two recording horns. Published originally in *The Gramophone* (December 1928), and reprinted for "*The Gramophone" Jubilee Book* (1973), 66.

Unlike the electric and digital eras, reverberation and resonance were not strictly avoided or restrained during the acoustic period. In fact, recording experts used

[52] Millard, *America on Record*, 259.
[53] See: Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 15-20; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*, 105–21; Aleks Kolkowski, Duncan Miller, and Amy Blier-Carruthers, "The Art and Science of Acoustic Recording: Re-Enacting Arthur Nikisch and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra's Landmark 1913 Recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony," *Science Museum Group Journal* 3, no. 03 (2015); Stanley Chapple, "In the Recording Studio," in *"The Gramophone" Jubilee Book*, ed. Roger Wimbush (Harrow: General Gramophone Publications Ltd., 1973), 64–70.

them to their advantage—to get more sound to and through the horns. For that matter, recording rooms tended to have high ceilings—another reason to be at the top of the buildings—as well as minimal or no furniture at all. Pictures, carpets, or other things that could dry or absorb the sound were regularly banned. Hence, living rooms, carpeted salons, or other stuffed locations were the least ideal places to make recordings, as one expert put it at the time:

> It is too full of pictures, bic-a-brac, furniture, and hangings. All sounds are subdued. The sounds waves, instead of going gaily about their business, frolicking around like children in the nursery seem to have on evening dress and observe company matters. There is no rebound in them; they lack elasticity and force. We must go somewhere where there is less restraint, where our sound waves can display their high spirits. We must have a room with a fairly high ceiling, and the floor covered, if at all, with linoleum or a similar material. The plainer the walls and the more solid, the better.[54]

If sound waves were like spirited children, then recording experts were the kind of parents that instead of restraining them fostered their carefree and restless behavior. Although stronger soundwaves could cause the recording to blast, they could as well allow for louder and more intelligible reproductions. Taking those chances were part of the cut and dried experimentation that led most of the activities and spontaneous decisions of recording experts. In spite of its simplicity, the room itself was subjected to experimentation. Brock-Nannestad reports that the loft of one of the studios of the Gramophone Co. at Blyth Road, Hayes, had a movable ceiling: "the loft was particular in that the ceiling below was suspended by a mechanism which permitted raising or lowering to change the acoustics."[55] Unlike Emily Thompson's claim that "little attention was paid to room acoustics until electricity entered the scene," the consideration of the multiple variables that

[54] "Taking Instrumental Records," 57.
[55] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis," 15.

recording experts dealt and experimented with makes evident the complexity of their craft as well as their comprehensive attentiveness to the material, artistic, and scientific factors of sound recording.[56]

The recording machine was usually set on a table at around three feet and a few inches from the ground, with the horn mounted on the wall, hanging from the ceiling, or supported by a horn stand. In general, the horn was tilted upwards by six to eight inches from end to end. As much as reverberation and resonance were appreciated in the room, they needed to be controlled inside the horn itself. Thus, it was fairly common to wrap tape around the horns, near the mouth, which helped reduce the metal's bell-like resonance without much affecting the acoustic resonance of the horn shape. Sometimes, rubber tubes were used to connect the small end of the horn with the soundbox so that resonance could be controlled by bending this tube slightly, being careful to not "kink" it and obstruct the flow of the waves.[57] Amidst a myriad of aspects to take into consideration, the most crucial endeavor of recording experts was the successful transmission of the sound for the sake of its reification as grooves on wax. The thriving of the industry and the fulfillment of its corporate aspirations depended on this.

In 1923, the Bray Studios released *The Immortal Voice,* a unique silent film about how acoustic records were made and one of the first documentaries ever produced.[58] In spite of its austerity, it is an insightful testimony about the mechanics of acoustic recording and the massive production of acoustic records before the advent of the electric era. In a scholarly field in which most of the current

[56] Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 263.
[57] "Taking Instrumental Records," 57-58; Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 14.
[58] *The Immortal Voice* (1923), The Bray Studios. Dir.: J. A. Norling. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQ6KmeLjLCs (Accessed 3/20/2018).

knowledge about the material procedures has been built out of indirect sources and experimental reconstructions of the technology many years later, this footage provides valuable clues. Directed by J. A. Norling, the 13-minute film followed, step by step, the process of production of an acoustic record—from the performance in a recording room to the duplication of the discs to its reproduction in a home setting. About two minutes into the film, one of the intertitles posed an intriguing question, meant to lead the technical narrative of the cinematic presentation: "What strange magic causes the spirit of music to spring to life at our command from a box of wood and steel?" In a clear attempt to highlight the transcendence of the invention and the industrial process in question, the film featured the soprano Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981), one of the most famous singers of the New York Metropolitan Opera at the time. The documentary does not make any explicit references to any recording companies, but considering Ponselle's alliances with Columbia and Victor between 1918 and 1923, it is possible that the footage and employees featured in the film were related to one of those companies.[59] In an interesting combination of live action material and drawn animations, the film illustrated the transmission of the sound waves coming out from Ponselle's mouth into the horn's mouth and then through the horn towards a spinning disc in a turntable. Along with Ponselle and other musicians in the studio, the live footage featured the recording equipment itself, including scenes of the wax blank disc being cut by the recording stylus, generating wispy threads of wax residue or, as described in one of the intertitles, "surplus wax shaved off in fine hairs." I will get back to these wax threads later.

[59] James A Drake, *Rosa Ponselle: A Centenary Biography* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997), 447–66.

This footage is unique. As the recording equipment was usually concealed in a different room, it hardly ever appears in available photographs of recording laboratories. Also, the drawings and animations in the film focused on different sections of the equipment, such as the wax blank, the glass diaphragm, and the lever that connected the cutting tool with the center of the diaphragm. The animations were also meant to offer a recreation of both the diaphragm vibration as sound waves pushed against it, and the way in which the needle carved the "undulating grooves in the revolving disc of wax"—as poetically set in the accompanying intertitle.

Once the quality of the recording is tested by the experts, as the film continues, the wax master is sent to the company's factory for its duplication—a process also recreated by straightforward animations interspersed with live scenes at the factory. First, the wax master is coated with graphite and then it is given a 24-hour electroplating bath for an additional layer of copper. The resulting metal shell that is stripped from the wax becomes the *metal master*, which carries a negative or "reversed impression" of the sound waves—in ridges rather than grooves. Then, also by means of electroplating, the company's employees create a *mother matrix*, that is, the metal counterpart of the grooved wax master. And then, again, a negative metal plate is crafted, but out of the mother matrix. This last plate is to become the stamper with which the records are to be made, while the metal master and the mother matrix are "filed" for the future, when the stamper deteriorates. The stamper shell is then "soldered to a heavy brass disc," and used to stamp the records from a plastic compound in a hydraulic press. Such plastic compound usually included shellac or celluloid. For double-sided records, one

stamper was needed for each side and both sides were pressed at the same time.[60]

Following the Victorian portrayal of a family enjoying the voice of Rosa Ponselle in a cabinet phonograph, maybe a Victrola, *The Immortal Voice* closes with a lament for not having been able to preserve the "silver tones" of Jenny Lind (1820-1887). At the same time, however, the film celebrates the availability of recordings by Enrico Caruso, who had passed away recently as one of the first transnational phonograph stars of the era. Featuring footage of him as Canio in *Pagliacci* at the Metropolitan Opera, the film ends with these words: "The whole world mourned the loss of this great singer, but unnumbered generations to come will be stirred by the beauty of his immortal voice."

Ironically, we never get to hear Ponselle's or Caruso's voice in *The Immortal Voice*. The paradox of a silent film about sound is heightened by the film's effort to convey the penetrating sonority and reproducibility of their recordings only by means of exultant intertitles. It might be a symptom of the frustration caused by the technical difficulties for achieving synchronization between sound and moving images, or simply a marketing strategy or a subtle invitation to the viewers to get the records and compensate for that lack of synchronization on their own. In any case, I think that the film's creative visual techniques constitute a multimedia

[60] As much as this process of records duplication seems to have been used with some difference by various companies in the late 1910s and the early 1920s, it is not to be taken necessarily as a standard practice. One of the first and most innovative methods for the duplication of records was developed by Emile Berliner in the 1890s. As explained by Morritt, "Berliner's recording device traced the sound on a zinc plate coated with beeswax. The recording was then sprayed with acid to etch the grooves into the zinc plate, forming a master record. The master was then electroplated, and the metal negative peeled away from the master plate was used to press copies in Duranoid —a hard plastic material that had previously been used to make buttons and telephone receivers." (Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," 9.) As it is evident, the method of duplication as presented in *The Immortal Voice* in 1923 developed to a significant extent out of Berliner's method. On the process of duplication, see also: "Duplicating Records," *Talking Machine News* (May 1904): 9; Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 20; Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 149–55.

surrogate for sound-and-moving-image synchronization. The portrayal of one medium—the phonograph record—through another—film—entailed a new kind of multimedia arrangement in itself, one that reflects how acoustic recording and silent filmmaking were considered by contemporary audiences as the highest technological achievements of their day. However, only a few years after the release of *The Immortal Voice*, the technologies of both acoustic recording and silent filmmaking went into oblivion, being replaced respectively by electric sound recording and talking cinema. Yet, the way in which the old technologies, and by extension multimedia experiments like *The Immortal Voice*, became outdated and regarded as obsolete in light of new technological standards, is an early testimony of how the history of media perception is usually entangled with the history of media technology.

It is worth asking what is that which we could not hear in *The Immortal Voice*? The obvious answer might be "the music," or Ponselle's and Caruso's voices for that matter. But I think there is more than that. It is not only that we cannot listen to *what* recording experts in acoustic studios listened to, but that we cannot listen *as* they did—and neither could Ponselle or Caruso. Rather than merely dependent on a functioning machine, the affordance of recorded sound in the early twentieth century was contingent upon the experts' performance of what I call "acoustic listening." Crafted by ear, their ability to listen via the recording mechanism entailed an ability to filter the musicality of the interpretations for the sake of the production of consumable records. Acoustic recording was certainly an intricate operation. Yet, as prescriptive as they seem, the technical details and considerations discussed in this section should not to be taken necessarily as a standard practice among recording experts at the time. Most likely, they represent

but a few of the many ways to deal with musical sounds in recording rooms. As the recording expert writing for *Talking Machine News* put it in 1903:

> I cannot emphasize too strongly that all the hints and suggestions I am giving in this series of articles are facts drawn from my own experience, which I have tested and found valuable. I do not pretend that I know everything and that anyone who goes in ways different from mine must on that account be wrong. In fact, I know there are professionals engaged in making records every day and who do not follow in every detail the same methods as myself. But I believe my way to be the best, and when I come to compare my product with theirs, I am still more emboldened to think so.[61]

Notwithstanding their idiosyncrasy, many of the recording procedures and arrangements outlined above coincide with other historical accounts and with the conclusions of recent experiments and investigations around the mechanics of acoustic recording.[62] Still, even if assuming them as fairly common sets of practices in the making of acoustic records, they would constitute but a segment in a historical sequence of changing standards. In the acoustic years, sound recording was a field of ongoing experimentation among a small host of experts. Trial and error was their motto. "There were no meters to guide them and no way to tell if the music entering the horn of the phonograph would re-emerge on the playback as a recognizable production. Acoustic recording was difficult to control and impossible to predict: a performance that sounded wonderful live might not sound as good on record, in fact it might not sound like it at all."[63]

[61] "Record Making III. Band Records," *Talking Machine News* (September 1903): 77.
[62] Besides the work of Copeland and Brock-Nannestad, see: Kolkowski, Miller, and Blier-Carruthers, "The Art and Science of Acoustic Recording."
[63] Millard, *America on Record*, 260.

While surveying the technical advantages of electric recording over the acoustic technology, Eric Morritt establishes that the portability of the electric equipment "made [it] possible to record in locations other than a record company's studio, since the equipment could be set almost anywhere. An acoustic recording setup was usually built into a recording room and could not be moved."[64] Notwithstanding the material challenges of traveling with recording equipment in the acoustic years, that was far from being the case. Considering the vulnerability of the technology and the various provisions needed to set the gear optimally, it was apparent that the acoustic paraphernalia was not supposed to be portable. Nevertheless, the recording industry engaged in traveling adventures almost from its inception. Edison's original business model included itinerant shows in the late 1880s, anthropologists began taking phonographs with them for their ethnographic fieldwork as early as 1890, and by the end of the next decade several companies had already set recording expeditions to multiple parts of the world.[65] Recording companies in the United States seized the opportunity whenever they could to bring foreign performers to their state-of-the-art studios in New York and New Jersey, either by taking advantage of the increasing immigrant population or by mobilizing musicians from remote lands. Still, this practice did not prevent them from engaging in international ventures with a bulk of equipment transported in numerous trunks on transoceanic steamships. In light of their design and operability, neither phonographs nor recording studios were meant to be on tour.

[64] Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," 11.
[65] See: Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 26–27; Patrick Feaster, "'The Following Record': Making Sense of Phonographic Performance, 1877–1908" (Indiana University, 2007), 138–47; González and Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile*, 176–80; Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way*, 53–60; Brian Hochman, *Savage Preservation*, 73–114.

Yet, they did. The expansive dynamics of the business in the early days of the music industry did not leave room for second thoughts. Indeed, untapped markets created the demand for troops of resourceful recording scouts.

One of the first traveling recording experts was Adalbert Theo Edward Wangemann (1855-1906), who began working for Edison in the late 1880s. Having been a pioneer in the development of recording techniques in the U.S., Wangemann's early interventions on musicians' dispositions overseas for the sake of the phonograph are prototypical and somewhat exemplary of the kind of interventions that recording scouts would make all over the world in the next few decades. According to Patrick Feaster,

> By the time Wangemann went to Europe in June 1889, he was already accustomed to rearranging performers around recording horns to achieve superior phonograms, so that when he set about recording the German Emperor's royal orchestra in Berlin he "suggested certain changes in the position of the instruments which experience had convinced him were more favorable to the blending and recording of sound than their ordinary disposition." The conductor at first refused to rearrange his orchestra, but when Wangemann went ahead and recorded it in its usual configuration, the Emperor was so dismayed upon listening to the phonogram that he ordered everything to be redone according to Wangemann's instructions. "The result," it was reported, "so pleased the emperor that at the next royal concert the strings, wood-wind and brass were placed 'à la phonograph.'"[66]

Undoubtedly, Fred Gaisberg (1873-1951) was the most emblematic and the most remembered traveling expert of his generation. As the foremost overseas agent of the Gramophone Co., he toured through multiple locations in Europe and Asia, recruiting local performers and bringing to the spotlight some of the first recording celebrities of the era, including Enrico Caruso, Fyodor Chaliapin, and Ignace Jan Pederewski. His diaries and memories are a rich testimony of the portability and the

[66] Feaster, "'The Following Record,'" 157.

extemporaneous character of acoustic recording. Making sometimes as many as 60 or 70 recordings in a single day, Gaisberg was a pioneer in the art of setting up makeshift studios in almost any imaginable location or circumstance. Some years before the labor division between technical experts and music directors, and many years before the emergence of music producers and managers proper, all these roles were encompassed in a single individual like Fred Gaisberg.[67] And that was also the case with a host of similar recording scouts of the acoustic era—including Victor agents like Harry Sooy, George Cheney, or Charles Althouse—although with less visibility and corporate muscle than Gaisberg. Like Gaisberg, these scouts had to deal with the puzzling materiality of the acoustic equipment and operated with an ample degree of autonomy when selecting performers and making decisions overseas on behalf of the company, as I discussed in chapter two. Unlike Gaisberg, however, they did not necessarily hasten making recordings to exceed their own expectations, but often worked under the pressure of predetermined goals of productivity set by their employers.[68] For the most part, that was the case with the various recording scouts of the Victor Talking Machine Company that traveled extensively across Latin America between 1903 and 1926, and to whom most of the rest of this chapter is devoted. Their activities show the extent to which portable recording during the acoustic era complied with and modified the material procedures followed at the companies' stationary laboratories.

In general, the intended setting of recording studios during the fieldtrips was consistent with the standards of the companies' laboratories at their headquarters

[67] See: Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round*; Strötbaum, *The Fred Gaisberg Diaries. Part 1: USA and Europe (1898-1902)*; Strötbaum, *The Fred Gaisberg Diaries. Part 2: Going East (1902-1903)*; Moore, *Sound Revolutions*, 173–75; Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*, 95; Millard, *America on Record*, 269; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 105–6.
[68] Millard, *America on Record*, 262.

in the United States and Europe. That is apparent, among other things, when considering the bulk of equipment taken by scouts for the Latin American tours and the adaptation of the physical spaces they found along the way. Likewise, the way in which the scouts had to rearrange performers and ensembles before the recording horns and the various musical interventions they fostered were not, in principle, very different from the kind of adjustments they routinely had to make when working in Camden, New York, Paris, or London. Nonetheless, the recording expeditions implied the engagement with a multiplicity of unforeseen physical and musical scenarios. Although being on tour was rationalized as the replication of metropolitan standards along a colonial circuit, the dynamics of such mobilization made all the more apparent the non-standard character of those standards.

If I am permitted a metaphor, making acoustic recordings was like cooking while recording companies were like restaurants. Many cooks know how to make the same favorite dish; they are familiar with the basic recipe, have the ingredients, and are confident with the procedure. Still, more often than not, certain cooks have particular secrets or a peculiar approach to the recipe, the result of which may have a profound impact on the clientele. And that is where competition and secrecy arise and even make sense among restaurants or, to come back to the early twentieth century, among recording companies and recording experts. The specificity of the fluctuating material arrangements worked out by the scouts was, paradoxically, predicated upon a seemingly fixed set of material procedures—or recording standards. Thus, it is a scenario, I argue, of non-standard standards, in which the circumstances of the recording expeditions helped enhance the ambiguity of the mechanical process of acoustic recording. Victor boasted that in the fieldtrips things were done just as in its studios in Camden, New Jersey, but often times that was

simply impossible due to the contingency and unpredictability of the musics and the physical spaces they found throughout the tours. Furthermore, as Peter Copeland explains, even if operating the same kind of machines used in Camden, the performance of the recording equipment "depended critically upon the properties of perishable materials such as string and rubber," which were used in crucial points in the assemblage; "some experts used their own personal sound boxes and recording horns which were their own trade-secrets. Indeed, we do not always know which expert made which recordings, let alone which equipment (...), the way the equipment was used [or] the placing of artists relative to the horn."[69]

In 1913, while working in the telegraph business in Lima, Peru, W. S. Barrell met two "Americans" who were having trouble with the menu in a hotel restaurant. While assisting them as a translator, Barrell found out that the two men were Victor employees who came to Lima "to make records of local artists." Barrell wrote:

> Their local impresario would not be arriving for a few days but in the meantime, they wanted to hire a room which could be used as a studio and install the equipment and as they were having considerable difficulty with the language they asked if I could help them. This I did and in due course a room was hired and the equipment collected from the docks. At this point it was very obvious that my presence was an embarrassment, however the next day I was invited to attend a recording session. On arrival, I found that the room had been partitioned by a large curtain through which a large metal horn projected. In front of this horn the artiste performed and although from time to time I heard a noise indicating that something was being wound up I was not permitted to look behind the curtain. What was the nature of this wonderful machinery? I know now that it did not consist of very much, which was probably the reason for the secrecy.[70]

Setting up temporary recording laboratories was a permanent test for the scouts' imagination. As some sketches in the ledgers show, the goal was to replicate the

[69] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 254.
[70] W. S. Barrell, "I was there," *The Gramophone,* June 1958, p. 41.

same layout of two adjacent rooms used at Victor's studios in New Jersey. Every new place implied specific arrangements in order to reproduce that layout or to procure something similar. As explained earlier, the recording machine was regularly concealed in one room and only its horn breached through the wall into the performers' room (Figure 11).

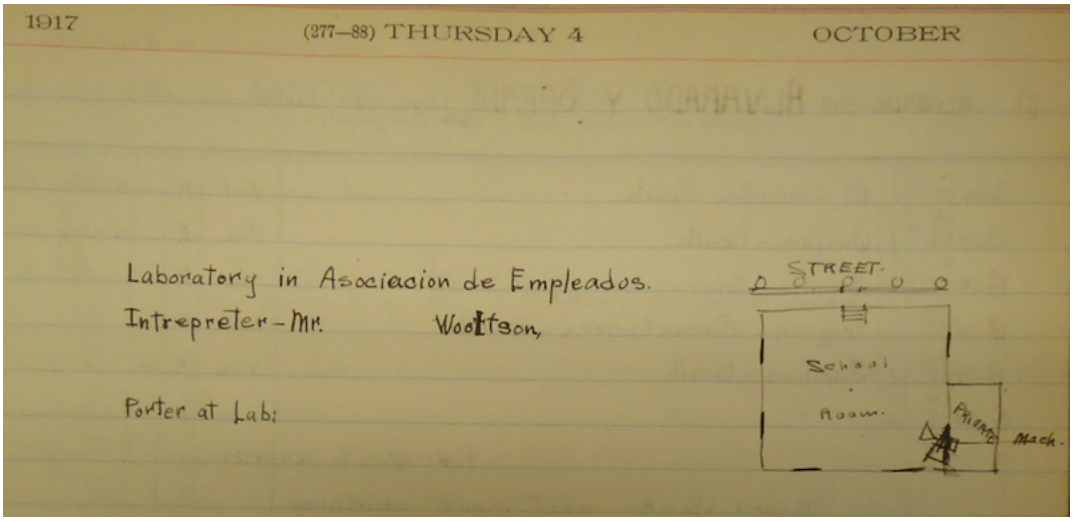

Figure 11: Drawing of a recording laboratory in Guayaquil, Ecuador, made presumably by Charles Althouse (Recording Ledgers, Victor Talking Machine Company, October 4, 1917)

Quite often, however, just as in the episode recalled by Barrell, the room was partitioned merely by a curtain. It is worth asking, even if for a moment, about the reasons behind the room partitioning and the concealment of the recording machine. For one, it might have been just a practical matter: the isolation facilitated the operation of the cutting mechanism, provided an additional layer of separation from external noises, and ultimately, kept recording experts and their equipment undisturbed.[71] Nonetheless, it might also have been the case, just as Barrell pointed out following the incident in Lima, that the reason for the secrecy was

[71] Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 16.

precisely that there was not much to see.[72] Despite the apparent simplicity of the recording mechanism and the scientific rhetoric behind the activities of the experts, the achievement of sound recording was surrounded, from the beginning, with an atmosphere of mystery, fascination, and even magic. Almost by the same token of deception performed by the Wizard of Oz, not revealing the trick nor breaking the illusion was somewhat vital for the sustained enthrallment before the technology and the continuity of the business.

This aura of secrecy, perceived by audiences and musicians alike in the U.S. and Latin America, reached corporate overtones in light of the ferocious competition between recording companies. As Brock-Nannestad establishes, "many of the deliberations and processes in early recording were regarded as commercial secrets."[73] This panorama is reinforced by several accounts of the affairs around patents and procedures in the early years of the industry. For instance, as Walter Welch wrote, "[t]he phonograph-graphophone story of the 1890s and well into the 1900s is one of ongoing espionage. The Edison and the American Graphophone interests maintained spies in each other's plants. Any change in the formula of Edison's cylinder blanks was immediately reported to American Graphophone at its headquarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Employees of one plant who suddenly turned up missing reappeared as employees of a competing plant."[74] At the same time, however, many other accounts point to the ongoing collaboration between recording companies. The relationship between the Gramophone Co. and Victor is a prime example, regardless of their corporate entanglements and mutual interests. Brock-Nannestad documented various

[72] See also: Schicke, *Revolution in Sound*, 73.
[73] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis," 3.
[74] Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*, 72.

instances of technical collaboration between recording experts of these two companies during the acoustic era, including the visits of Fred and William Gaisberg to the Victor plant in the United States, the trips of John English and Raymond Sooy to the Gramophone Co.'s headquarters in England, and Sooy's mentoring of J. Jackson, another British technician.[75] Similarly, the production of documentary films like *The Immortal Voice* might well have been an attempt to offer a more transparent presentation of the actions taking place behind the walls and curtains or, at least, it was a symptom of the demystification of the recording room towards the end of the acoustic period.[76] Yet, the atmosphere of mystery was very prominent during the course of the Latin American expeditions and played a crucial role for the fascination and bewilderment of a whole generation of performers who encountered the technology for the first time via the itinerant excursions of Victor's employees.

The recording experts that Barrell met were Frank Rambo and Charles Althouse who, as we saw in chapter two, spent most of the second semester of 1913 in a recording trip through Peru and Colombia. The recording ledgers that scouts filled over the course of the expeditions included, just as the same documents in the Camden laboratory, detailed, almost cryptic annotations about

[75] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis," 7–10. In his study, Brock-Nannestad's study cover a significant portion of Fred Gaisberg's 1907 report, William Gaisberg's 1908 report, various technical exchanges between 1909 and 1912, and Sooy's activities in England in 1921. Some interesting aspects include a series of Victor's practice in Camden, such as to keep the room temperature between 70 and 80 degrees F in order to avoid warming the plates, the reproduction of a recording from the recording room into the "Artists Room" to judge its quality collectively and determine the need for additional takes, the re-grooving of records as an intervention on the groove after the recording to facilitate the process of duplication, the use of joint connectors to link multiple horns, the attachment of cutting needles to different kind of sound boxes, as well as information about the kind of needles and styluses used, the sources of wax for the masters, sound boxes, and diaphragms.

[76] Already in 1903, the recording expert writing the series of articles about sound recording for *Talking Machine News*, expressed that one of the purposes of his articles was to debunk the "mystery" that had been surrounding the practice of acoustic recoding. See: "Record Making IV. Vocal Records," *Talking Machine News* (October 1903): 100.

the material configuration of the recording equipment, usually in three columns. The first two columns refer, respectively, to the type of sound box—the small device between the horn and the wax plates—and the kind of recording horns used for each recording. The third column contains information about the devices used to connect various horns at the same time—an issue to which I will come back later.[77] To begin with, it is noteworthy to consider the bulk of equipment these scouts carried with them. Considering only the tour through Peru and Colombia, they used apparently nine different kinds of sound boxes and six different horns. The scouts carried a portable recording machine—the turntable upon which the recording needle cut the warm wax masters. In a special report about an expedition to East Asia around the same time, the company boasted that even if more "compact," such portable machine was identical to the ones used in Victor's "big laboratories" in New Jersey. Their luggage also included around 400 blank wax masters as well as motors, dynamos, copper wires, and other technical minutiae. The total cargo, as mentioned in the same report, accounted for 30 trunks.[78]

According to Brock-Nannestad, Victor had fewer traveling recording experts than the Gramophone Co., and certainly the latter company engaged in more and more frequent expeditions than the former. Apparently, not only Gramophone's equipment was more portable than Victor's, but also the different approach each company had towards recording ventures overseas made the luggage of the British scouts much lighter than that of their U.S. counterparts. Indeed, the frequency and

[77] See: Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 255–56 The examination of Victor's ledgers from its studios in Camden since 1902 was crucial for decyphering these columns. For the understanding of these documents I benefited greatly from the insight of George Brock-Nannestad.
[78] Victor Talking Machine Company. "La Compañía Victor ha grabado un magnifico repertorio en el Lejano Oriente. Impresiones de viaje. Interesante coleccion de preciosas fotografias sacadas por nuestros peritos grabadores." *La Voz de la Victor. Organo de propaganda de la Victor Talking Machine Co. Camden, NJ, E.U. de A*. Tomo II. No. 2. Junio (1916) 15.

simultaneity of Gramophone's travels throughout Europe and Asia allowed them to keep local provisions of horns and other items, unlike Victor's employees who had to carry all the gear with them each time they traveled. The heaviest portion of the cargo was the crates that carried the blank wax masters. Each master weighted usually between 10 and 11 pounds, so that a single three-month expedition could easily add up to half of a ton. Furthermore, whereas the Gramophone Co. managed to reduce that weight (and the number of crates) by shaving discarded masters to be re-used within the same trip, Victor usually "played it safe," that is, it aimed for a more durable (and arguably better sounding) master record. Such approach implied, evidently, the transportation of as many masters back and forth as recordings were intended or made.[79]

While the notes about sound boxes consist mostly of single annotations—as if keeping a record of the kind used for each piece—the horns appear in a multiplicity of combinations, indicating the various arrangements needed to accommodate for expected and unexpected changes in instrumentation, acoustic properties, space, and place. School buildings were often the preferred scenarios for makeshift recording studios, but also were hotel rooms, musicians' houses, and other venues. Even if the material arrangements for making acoustic recordings were somewhat established by then, the tours posed a series of unpredictable challenges that demanded variable doses of improvisation. Before dealing with the performers, or while dealing with them, the scouts had to ensure the optimal operation of the machine. To begin with, they had to assemble the different parts of the acoustic equipment, including the motor, the turntable, the wax masters, the cutting needle, the sound box, and the horns. In order to drive the turntable at a

[79] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis." (and email exchange).

steady pace they normally used weight motors. Electric or battery-powered motors were rarely an option, not only because of the uncertainty of electrical current supply, but because of all the unwanted noise and vibrations those motors generated.[80] Although not ideal either, winding spring motors seem to have been kept at hand just in case.

In terms of the cutting tool, each recording expert seemed to have had their own standards and even made their own cutters, although sapphire was, arguably, the preferred material.[81] For playback purposes, Victor continually advertised newly developed needles, meant to be used exclusively with Victor phonographs, promising better sound and more durability. However, just as the scouts themselves, end-users in Latin America often made their own needles out of a host of natural materials, had different opinions about how many times a single needle ought to be used, and even developed their own standards for the operation and maintenance of the machines.[82] The most essential object within the sound box was the diaphragm. Its vibration, as indicated earlier, provided the driving force for the cutting stylus. Just as recording and reproducing needles were different, so

[80] A significant challenge for electric-powered motors was having a constant and reliable supply of energy power. Another problem was getting rid of additional power as the motor required so little. As explained in an early article on the matter in *Talking Machine News,* "[m]ost phonograph motors take about two to three ampéres at a pressure of two volts." (TMN, November 1903, p. 124). Considering that the voltage of electric current supplied was usually between 100 and 250 volts, depending on the country, the excess of volts needed to be channeled somewhat. "The common practice is to interpose two or three incandescent lamps for lighting the premises, in series with the motor, to act as a resistant." (Ibid). A downside was, of course, that lamps were not needed, were "superfluous" and cumbersome when making recordings during the day, and added a surplus of unwanted heat. "This objection has to some extent been removed by a device of Mr. Smithurst, of the Edison-Bell Co., who employs an electric accumulator of about sixty ampéres capacity in series with the lamps, and again in series with the battery, while the phonograph is used at night. By this arrangement the accumulator may be kept charged for use during the day." (Ibid). This fully charged battery could be taken to places without electric supply (such as rural areas) and run the motor inside the machine just by means of the battery, which fully charged can run up to a month or more (if in domestic use). Clearly, more electric arrangements as well as different kinds of batteries were available at the time. However, although some recording experts seem to have powered their motors by electric means, weight motors were the preferred alternative, especially for traveling adventures.

[81] Barrell, "I was there," p. 41.

[82] González Rodríguez and Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile*, 194–95.

were recording and reproducing sound boxes and diaphragms; recording items were usually smaller and much more delicate.[83] The diameter of recording diaphragms varied, from 30 mm (1 3/16 of an inch) to 51 mm (about 2 inches), and also their thickness changed depending on their specific use or the preference of each expert, ranging from 0.17mm to 0.25mm. In most accounts, thick glass diaphragms are mentioned as being useful for loud and high frequencies (i.e. brass bands), while thin diaphragms were believed to do a better job for "faint and mellow" sounds, like a solo violin.[84] For some recording experts, selecting the right diaphragm was as important as having a functioning recording machine:

> I have seen a record maker, who has the reputation of being the best in the business, spend half-an-hour at a time testing and selecting diaphragm glasses. His method is worth describing. He tosses them lightly on to a marble slab and listens critically to the 'ring' of them. He also bends them between his fingers to test their elasticity. Not only he has different diaphragms for different singers, but for each singer he has several of different degrees of sensitiveness. When the singer's voice begins to fall off from its first robustness, he substitutes a new recorder [cutting tool] of a more delicate responsiveness, as to make up for the slight loss of power.[85]

Most diaphragms were made of glass. Durability and elasticity—or "some amount of spring"—were essential properties for glass diaphragms in general. Also, attaching the lever carrying the cutting needle to the diaphragm was a crucial operation: "The recording point should be fastened on the glass at an angle of about 20 [degrees]. There are some points about the angle and the length of the recorder point holder, which can only be learned by experience. I mean by this, that

[83] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 268.
[84] Copeland, 268–70 Copeland's description derives primarily from the examination of materials and sources related to His Master's Voice and Columbia. Apparently, the measurement of Victor's items was not substantially different.
[85] "Record Making I. Mechanical Appliances," *Talking Machine News* (July 1903): 37.

different effects are produced by having different angles and lengths."[86] Whereas in permanent laboratories recording experts used glass diaphragms most of the time, during the expeditions they seemed to prefer mica as the diaphragm material, since it was more resistant than glass.[87] When on tour, recording experts had different diaphragms at their disposal, and whenever possible they recorded the same selection with different diaphragms, being aware of the fact that each diaphragm and each sound box "had a sound quality of its own."[88] At the end of the day, the quality of the recordings and the suitability of the specific materials were determined, literally, by ear.

There were different kinds of horns available, and the scouts carried between 6 and 12 with them during the tours. For the sake of its specific use, the three most significant features in a horn were its material, its dimensions, and its shape. Recording technicians experimented with a variety of materials for the horns during the acoustic era, including glass and wood, but metal horns (made of brass, tin, copper or aluminum) were the most used throughout. While straight, conical horns with a circular mouth were frequently used for recording voices, elongated, angled, or elliptical horns were tried sometimes for grand pianos or violins in view of the directionality of their sounds and their relative positions in the studio layout.[89] In this light, each particular kind of horn was usually labeled by a number, and Victor scouts kept a detailed register in the ledgers of the kind used for each

[86] "Mechanical Appliances," 37.
[87] Letter from W. Sinkler Darby to Charles Scheuplein, George F. Hampe, and Theodor H. M. Hampe. Paris, October 6, 1907. (EMI Archives). Transcribed by Brock-Nannestad.
[88] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 270.
[89] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis."; Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 249–74. "Mechanical Appliances," *Talking Machine News*, July (1903) 37-38; "Taking Instrumental Records," *TMN*, August (1903) 57-58; "Band Records," *TMN* September (1903) 77-78; "Voice Records," *TMN*, October (1903) 100. I profoundly appreciate the support and knowledge of George Brock-Nannestad for the clarification of many issues covered in this chapter, over the course of multiple email exchanges between 2017 and 2018.

individual recording. The horns that figured the most during Victor's expeditions through Latin America were No. 11, 11½, 60, and 70. All these were, apparently, straight conical horns. Horns 11 and 11½ were shorter and had smaller mouths than the 60 and 70. The 11½ horn in particular was 30 inches long with a diameter of 8 inches at its mouth. Although I have not found the specific dimensions of No. 11, it was presumably very similar to No. 11½, with the latter being maybe just a later development of the first. The horn No. 60 was 40 inches long and had a mouth of 10 inches in diameter; the horn No. 70 was slightly shorter (39 and half inches) but had a bigger mouth (with a diameter of 13 inches).[90]

According to the ledgers, while horns 11 and 11½ were used especially for smaller ensembles of 3 or 4 performers with or without a singer, horns 60 and 70 were the preferred ones for larger bands and orchestras. By the same token, horns 11 and 11½ often appear in relation to ensembles including stringed instruments of various kinds (guitars, mandolins, bandolas, etc.) as well as pianos, flutes, and violins, whereas horns 60 and 70 figured almost exclusively when brass instruments were included. Although the ensembles were, in general, of one kind or another, prompting the use of either 11s or 60/70s, in some occasions, as we will see later, both sets of horns were combined for the recording of the same ensemble. Other horns mentioned less frequently in the ledgers were No. 17 and

[90] Although pretty much each company crafted its own horns, there was somewhat of a shared understanding among recording experts about the functionality of each kind. By virtue of the corporate alliance between the Gramophone and Victor, it is possible that besides the exchange between technical experts of the two companies, there was a shared material universe in terms of equipment. For that matter, Brock-Nannestad's relation of Gramophone's traveling horns from the company's archive in Hayes (Middlesex, England), from which the measurements I present come from, is illustrative of the kind of horns Victor scouts may have used in their trips across Latin America. Another horn mentioned in the ledgers of the expeditions, but about which I haven't found much information, is No.12. Brock-Nannestad also reports a horn No. 11½a, which seems to be almost the same No. 11½, except that its mouth was angled, which resulted in an ellipse with two diameters: of 8½ inches and 9½ inches respectively. At the same time, however, when describing the horns journals like *Talking Machine News* referred to their dimensions rather than codes or numbers. The reason for this might be that horn numbers were company-specific and were not usually published or divulged.

No. 01. Similar to the 11 and 11½, the horn 17 was used generally for speech and vocal performances, either by soloists or small ensembles, or in combination with other horns when recording singers accompanied by large ensembles and orchestras. The horn type 01 seems to have been one of those horns angled at their axis, and thus useful for recording piano accompaniments directly from the sounding board.[91]

Victor scouts frequently recorded with two or more horns simultaneously. A kind of stereo recording still in the acoustic era, decades before the official advent of stereo recording per se. Using two horns simultaneously was a somewhat extended practice in recording laboratories at the time, but the proper linkage between the two horns with the diaphragm and the soundbox turned out to be much more challenging in the nomadic scenario of the recording expeditions. The link was possible by means of a special Y-shaped brass connector, or "joint." The scouts used short rubber tubes to connect the horns and the soundbox with each of the joint's prongs. For this matter, both the horns and the soundbox ended also in tubes of the same diameter as the prongs.[92] Besides the challenge of achieving an accurate connectivity, the scouts had to make sure that the sound waves were transmitted with enough strength in order to guarantee the completion of the recording process in the cutting surface. Generally, connecting two horns helped to channel more sound waves from different places in the recording room into the soundbox. It was also useful to avoid sound refraction and sound leakage, and, if done properly, it could potentially increase the volume of the recording. At the

[91] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 255.
[92] Brock-Nannestad, "The Objective Basis"; Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, Chapter 3, paragraph 14: http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap3.html.

same time, however, chances were that instead of getting good vibrations, sound energy could be lost, absorbed, reflected, turned into heat, or that the sound waves coming through one horn could actually escape through the other.[93]

Besides facilitating the intelligibility of the different instruments or sound sources, connecting various horns was another way to control and improve the mix. When Fred Gaisberg visited Victor's headquarters in 1907, he reported that three horns were used at the same time in a single recording. Two horns were attached to each side of the rubber tube that connected the main orchestral horn with the soundbox. By virtue of this arrangement, Peter Copeland writes, "[s]ound waves from the main horn were unobstructed, but individual soloists could be brought close to the additional horns and their sounds injected into the main tube."[94] Thus, even though all the horns were picking up something, the sound waves in one of them were carried more directly into the diaphragm. Such horn was usually pointing to the main performer or the main section of performers. The other horns compensated for what could not be captured by the main horn, but the sounds they carried were less prominent in the resulting sound mix. Although Y-shaped connectors were useful for connecting two horns, recording operations involving three, four, or more horns implied different gadgets and accessories.[95] The scouts

[93] Copeland, *Manual of Analogue Sound Restoration Techniques*, 262–63.
[94] Copeland, 264.
[95] Copeland, 264. In his manual, Peter Copeland explains another possible, rather intricate way to connect two horns while minimizing sound leakage, as reported by Paul Whiteman and others: "This is to connect one horn to one side of the diaphragm, and the other horn to the other (…) Instead of the recording-machine being placed behind a wall or vertical partition at one end of the studio, [Paul Whiteman] describes it hidden inside a four-sided box, with what looked like ladders on each side, erected in the middle of the studio. The four walls of the box each had a recording-horn protruding some five feet above the floor ('in the form of a four-leaved clover'), and the recording-expert was encased with his machine so no-one could see what he was up to. In this context, it seems the four horns fed the recording-machine by the shortest possible routes, namely through a pair of Y-tubes, each to a different side of the diaphragm. The only apparent alternative would have been a complex array of pipes all terminating on one side of the diaphragm. (…) Victor (…) invented an improvement which they called "the DR System", in which two recording soundboxes were coupled together at their centres by a steel wire under tension.

kept a systematic register in the ledgers of the different combinations of horns for every recording as well as of the items used to connect multiple horns. Sadly, the specific characteristics of many of these connectors are still unknown to us.

While the information about the soundboxes usually changes from expedition to expedition, the annotations concerning the linking and combination of horns are relatively consistent throughout. As a point of illustration let's consider the trips between 1910 and 1913 (Buenos Aires, 1910; Mexico City, 1910; Havana, 1911; Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, 1912; Havana 1913; and Lima and Bogotá, 1913). A little over 2,000 recordings were made in these tours alone, which corresponds to almost a third of the total of recordings made by Victor over the course of the Latin American expeditions in the acoustic era. In general, the selections involving a single performer, such as a guitar solo or a monologue, were done with just one No. 11 horn. That was also the case, sometimes, with unaccompanied dialogues, instrumental duets, or "dramatic scenes" that required the sporadic intervention of a musical instrument (i.e. a cornet signaling a war episode in the narration or evocation of a historical event). For the most part, selections with three or more performers entailed the use of, at least, two horns at the same time. Apparently, one of the most common combinations in South America was that of a vocal duet accompanied by one or two instruments. That entailed either two No. 11 horns or three horns: two No. 11 and one No. 11½. In Peru and Colombia in particular, such duets were either male or female,

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The effect of this would be very similar to one soundbox addressed from both sides, while permitting as many as eight horns." (Copeland, 264-265). See: Paul Whiteman, *Records for the Millions* (New York: Hermitage Press Inc., 1948) 3; and George Brock-Nannestad, "The Victor Talking Machine Co. New process of recording," *Historic Record*. No. 35 (April, 1995) 29.

accompanied by one or two guitars (or other traditional stringed instruments), with the eventual addition of a percussion instrument like the *cajón.*

For some small instrumental ensembles, the scouts used as many as four horns simultaneously. These included, for example, a fair amount of *estudiantinas* or groups of four or more traditional guitar-like instruments (i.e., mandolins, bandolas, bandurrias, tiples, guitars, etc) as well as trios, quartets, or quintets comprised of pianos, violins, flutes, or woodwinds. Quite often, accompanied vocal duets and traditional string ensembles had, for some pieces, additional wind instruments such as vernacular flutes (i.e., *millos, pitos*) or ocarinas. In most of these cases, the horn configuration entailed two horns No. 11 and one or two No. 11½, linked by different devices registered either by kind (1, 1c, 2, 5, 5c, 33, 33c, etc.) or by the combination of two kinds (1+14, 2+14, 9+14, 33+14, etc.). On the other hand, as mentioned above, larger ensembles, such as bands and orchestras, implied the use, primarily, of horns No. 17, 60, and 70—longer and bigger than the No. 11s. Although these appear in different combinations, the two most common were 60-60-70 and 60-60-17.

Customarily, a configuration of soundbox, horns, and linking devices was kept consistent throughout most of the recording session of the same artist or ensemble. The most variable item from piece to piece was, as expected, the soundbox. Whenever the same number was recorded twice (two “takes”), a different soundbox was almost always used each time (cf. Victor 67016A, 65926A, 65635B, 65823A). Such consistency was due, in part, to the experience of the experts recording similar performances or musical groupings in both Victor’s laboratories in New Jersey and across the Americas. Although each new place entailed an encounter with different sets of musical practices and idiosyncratic

artistic expressions, the scouts usually found instrumental formats with which they were familiar, such as bands or orchestras, even if their particular repertoires sounded entirely foreign. Despite their unfamiliarity with some traditional instruments or groups, they regularly managed to relate those musical assemblages with others they had worked with, finding without much delay what they considered the most suitable arrangement of the recording equipment—particularly in terms of the selection and combination of cutting tools, diaphragms, horns, and linking devices. Nevertheless, the unique nature of certain ensembles made the completion of this material puzzle particularly challenging.

One of those scenarios took place on November 10, 1913 with the Orquesta Union Musical de Bogotá, directed by Jerónimo Velasco. While the ledgers concerning other artists in this and previous expeditions exhibit a relatively consistent panorama of the equipment used throughout the recording session, as described above, the page for this orchestra stands out for its multiple annotations—especially in relation to the first four (out of ten) pieces recorded. For the first number, the tango "Cómo ha estado" [How Have You Been], Rambo and Althouse used a 100-3F soundbox, two horns (17 and 60) and a joint No. 2. For the second piece, "Los cadetes" [The Cadets], a march, most of the items changed. They used a 96F soundbox instead, added an 11½ horn, and changed the position of the other two horns (60 and 17), which demanded a different connecting device (5c). Then, for the "Himno Nacional de Colombia" [Colombia's National Anthem], the third selection in the list, they kept the soundbox but replaced the 11½ horn with two 11 horns, having now four in total connected by two devices (9+14). Finally, for the recording of the fourth piece, "Qué mujeres" [What Women], another tango, the scouts set the material configuration that would remain for the rest of the

recording session: the 96F soundbox, three horns (60, 17, and 11½), and one linking device (5). Only the soundbox changed in three of the six remaining pieces (96-3F).

Apparently, the relatively rare instrumental format of the Union Musical—which included mandolin-like guitars, bowed string instruments, woodwinds, flutes, brass instruments, and percussions—made things complicated for the recording experts at the beginning. While trying to figure out the disposition of the equipment, the recording session offered new opportunities for experimentation with the technology. Besides crafting a recording layout for a particularly diverse instrumental set, the scouts had to accommodate their material arrangements temporarily to new factors and variables, such as the inclusion of a male vocal quartet for the National Anthem (Victor 65882B). At the same time that they attempted to enhance the quality of the recordings, they took their chances for what could eventually be either satisfactory or disposable matrixes. In all of this session, as well as in most of the recording sessions in Bogotá, Rambo and Althouse did not make multiple takes of almost any piece. Being on a tight schedule, and considering that the trip to Bogotá was not even part of the original plan, they had to refine the accuracy of some material procedures on the spot, hoping to get good results when eventually testing the recordings. On the whole, their provisions proved acceptable to the company. All but one of the recordings made by the Union Musical that day turned out to be commercialized as 10-inch double sided records. As if proving right the recording experts' intuition, the one recording that

did not make it to massive distribution was “Cómo ha estado,” the first piece Velasco’s orchestra played that day in front of the recording horns.[96]

Stroh violins made also their way to Latin America and were part of the pool of resources available to recording experts and performers alike, as in the case of the famous tango recordings made by the Argentinian musician Julio de Caro (1899-1980).[97] But other, more extemporaneous interventions over musical instruments for the sake of their recordability took place during the tours. In January 1917, just to give one example, for the recording of a traditional trio in Venezuela—“native harp, cuatro [and] maracas”—Althouse tells us that “Mr. Cheney took seeds out of the maracas and replaced [them with] steel ball bearings.”[98] For the scouts, however, it was not only about material arrangements. As we discussed in chapter two, the language barrier was a common challenge, particularly taxing when dealing with specific instructions while making the recordings. On August 29 in Lima, during the same long transnational expedition of 1917, Althouse wrote a set of directions, in a somewhat broken Spanish, clearly meant to secure the compliance of the performers with the technical demands of the recording procedures:

> When you hear a bell, get ready; when you see the white light, be quiet; when you see the green light, start singing or doing whatever you are [supposed] to do; when you see the red light, it is just an indication that you should stop singing or whatever you are doing at the earliest opportunity, but never in the middle of a song, a verse, or a word (…) When you are done singing, don’t move from your position and don’t make any kind of noise until the red light goes off.[99]

[96] In chapters 2 and 4 I examine, respectively, the history of the expeditions—including the extemporaneous character of the trip to Colombia—and the familiarity/unfamiliarity of the scouts with the musics they encountered during the tours.
[97] Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*, 62–63.
[98] Victor Recording ledgers (Caracas, January 27, 1917)
[99] Recording ledgers for 1917 (Victor Talking Machine Company ledgers), my translation: “Cuando se toque una campanilla, es señal para alistarse. Cuando se dá [*sic*] la luz Blanca, es para guardar silencio.

Recording experts in the acoustic era often expressed that it was not enough to be a fine performer. It was also essential to be familiar with phonographic recording and to be able to accommodate to the limitations and special requirements of the technology.[100] Playing for the phonograph was a whole different monster than playing live. Performing in a recording laboratory was a frantic struggle for many performers and for the technicians who had to deal with them. Often times, musicians needed more practice, had a hard time staying within the 3-minute limit of the recording material, or simply panicked in front of the recording horn. Phonographic anxiety was pervasive and frequently exacerbated by the high temperatures of recording rooms. As if dealing with the instability and vulnerability of the equipment was not hard enough, the scouts had to deal with musicians in distress, serve as vocal coaches, or take the lead for the improvisation of musical arrangements on the fly—as mentioned also in chapter two.[101] Sometimes, such changes were prepared in advance by the composers or the sessions' musical directors—that is, local musicians who helped recruit local performers and resolve musical issues. More often than not, however, these and other improvisations took place on the spot, following the directions *of* and in compliance *with* the recording experts and their multi-colored lights.

In spite of the specificities of recording procedures as carried out in Camden, and the general expectations of the equipment behavior in relation to

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Cuando se dá [*sic*] la luz verde, debe empezar a cantar o lo que sea. Cuando se dá [*sic*] la luz Lacre, es una prevención para que se deje de cantar o lo que sea, en el punto mas cercano y propicio. Jamas debe parar en la mitad de un trabajo, verso o palabra porque se ha dado la luz lacre. Despues de haber terminado de cantar, no debe moverse de su posicion ni hacer ninguna clase de ruido hasta que no se apague la luz lacre. CSA. Lima, Aug 29 – 17."

[100] See: "Record Making. Band Records," *Talking Machine News*, September 1903, 77.

[101] Ospina Romero, "Talent Scouts, Drunk Musicians"; See: Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 19.

certain ensembles, voices, or music instruments, recording experts on tour had to be ready to accommodate their craft depending on the particular circumstances of each session or the unusual playing of certain performers. As early as in 1903, the recording expert writing for *Talking Machine News* shared his perspective about it: "…these suggestions as to placing the performer are more or less general in their nature, and are not to be followed blindly as hard and fast rules that admit of no deviation. You might find one cornetist, for example, who would make a most successful record four feet away from the recording machine; whilst another has such a peculiar style of playing that it would be necessary for him to be nearly twice that distance away. Special instrumentalists demand special treatment. In short, follow my hints for ordinary work, and modify them as circumstances may demand."[102] To be sure, recording scouts' labor was much more complex and intricate than the simple portrayal we often get of them in histories of the phonograph and the recording industry, in which, as a matter of fact, recording experts are frequently bypassed or taken for granted.[103] Rather than merely technical operators, recording experts fulfilled a crucial role as intermediaries between the phases of production and consumption of commercial media entertainment—in a way not substantially different from the work of music producers in later decades, as studied, among others, by Antoine Hennion.[104] Thus, their activities were crucial not only for the reconfiguration of local musics as portable commodities (a.k.a. records), but for the inauguration of unprecedented dynamics of globalization in the music industry.

[102] "Record Making II. Taking Instrumental Records," *Talking Machine News* (August 1903): 58.
[103] See references in note 5.
[104] Hennion, "An Intermediary between Production and Consumption."

On Affordances, Acoustic Listening, and Other Conclusive Remarks

In his brief characterization of recording practices during the acoustic period, Eric Morritt brings forth another problematic generalization—the assumption that acoustic recordings were of "limited quality," "not pressed for public enjoyment" and, if produced in a fieldtrip setting, they "were used primarily for folkloristic study or experimental purposes."[105] Morritt is not alone in his appreciation. Such ideas, along with the portrayal of acoustic records as a marginal side of the business and centered chiefly in highbrow musics, are common misconceptions in many historical accounts of the phonograph and the music industry.[106] By contrasting the acoustic phonograph with subsequent technological innovations, such as electric recording, these histories usually take for granted the acoustic setting as rudimentary—just as they tend to minimize the outreach of the industry during the acoustic period by comparing it with the mass appeal of the entertainment trade since the late 1920s. The problem of this view is not the historicization of the technological means or of the industry's imperial expansion. The problem is twofold. First, it is the assessment of acoustic standards in light of technical innovations that had not taken place yet. Just like a fictional time traveler from the future who renders the past societies he encounters as primitive, such anachronistic conclusions bypass the fact that, prior to 1925, acoustic phonographs and acoustic records constituted the highest technological standards in the arena of sound reproduction. The same goes for the threshold of perception in terms of their sound quality. It was, simply put, the best sound they could get. More

[105] Morritt, "Early Sound Recording Technology and the Bristol Session," 7.
[106] See for example: Schicke, *Revolution in Sound*; Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*; Millard, *America on Record*; Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 67–68, 86–87; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, 28–29.

importantly, though, it was about the configuration of a new mode of aurality, based not so much on a critical examination of the capturing properties of the medium but on the willing incorporation of recorded sounds—as potentially entertaining and enjoyable sounds—into the social and cultural fabric of quotidian experiences, or what João Silva aptly calls "the mechanization of everyday life."[107] In the end, for recording experts and audiences alike it was all about listening. Even though one finds countless complaints about the unintelligibility or unsuccessful capture of some phonographic renditions, for the most part audiences were truly fascinated and pleased with the music they listened to through their machines, as in this comment published in *The Times* in 1922:

> …the constant burr of the revolving disc is very present to the ears. It is extraordinary, however, the extent to which one can forget the burr as one concentrates the mind to catch the balance of phrase with phrase, the interweaving of the instruments, the details which distinguish line from colour, to use the phraseology which music has borrowed from another art. The gramophone record used in this way is, in fact, a close analogy to the faithful photograph, a thing which acquires its value from our knowledge of the original, and serves not only to recall but to deepen appreciation of the original.[108]

Indeed, both the novelty of the technology and the aesthetic appeal of the reproductions were crucial for the steady growth of the phonograph business between the late 1880s and the early 1920s. This takes us to the second problem with Morritt's and others' misconceptions—the extrapolation of the viability of the business vis-à-vis the assumption of the technology as rudimentary. In other words, it is another kind of technological determinism in which the technology's affordance

[107] João Silva, *Entertaining Lisbon : Music, Theater, and Modern Life in the Late 19th Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 234.
[108] "Gramophone music: encouragement of close listening," *The Times*, 42963, 23 (February 1922): 10, quoted by Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3, paragraph 30.

defines both its cultural currency and the conditions of possibility of the recorded music industry. Again, this is a widespread notion, even if not always stated explicitly, in sound recording histories, from the pioneering accounts of Roland Gelatt and Walter Welch to the recent contributions by Mark Katz, Susan Schmidt-Horning, Michael Denning, and others.[109] As Paula Jarzabkowski and Trevor Pinch explain, the notion of "affordance" is relational. Rather than accounting merely for what technologies can do, the affordance of a particular object or technology is contingent to the activities it is performed upon by human beings.[110] This does not imply a reaffirmation of the preeminence of human agency, but instead, of the entanglements of the human and non-human for the constituency of technological affordances.

Akrich & Latour introduced the notion of material scripts to account for the particular purposes with which objects are designed in light of their material possibilities—what they can and cannot afford. Both the objects and the humans who make use of them subscribe to such material scripts for the fulfillment of those designed purposes, although, as a rule of thumb, "scripts are underwritten."[111] Objects can certainly afford other possible actions, quite beyond the original purposes they were prescribed with, and thus be "repurposed" in the course of the

[109] See: Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*; Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, 1877-1977*; Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*; Millard, *America on Record*; Katz, *Capturing Sound*; Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*; Denning, *Noise Uprising*. Jonathan Sterne offered one of the first solid critiques of the "technological determinism" and the "impact narratives" by which technologies appear as "primary agents of historical change," "divine actors," or "mysterious beings with obscure origins that come down from the sky to 'impact' human relations." (Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 7–8.)
[110] P. Jarzabkowski and T. Pinch, "Sociomateriality Is 'the New Black': Accomplishing Repurposing, Reinscripting and Repairing in Context," *Management (France)* 16, no. 5 (2013): 579–92.
[111] Jarzabkowski and Pinch, 583; See: Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour, "A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Nonhuman Assemblies," in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law, 1st MIT Press pbk. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 259–64.

same human and non-human interactions.[112] One can sit on a chair but one can also use it as a shield or as a weapon. The acoustic recording equipment entailed a prescribed sequence of actions and allowed for sound inscription on wax. The ways in which recording scouts tinkered with the technology made possible such affordance in the first place, but were the catalyst for other affordances, both intended and unexpected, including increasing the volume of the recordings, channeling independent currents of soundwaves into a single recording mechanism, and forging alterations in timbre, pitch, and sound balance. To be sure, the material scripts inscribed upon recording machines in the acoustic era provided the condition of possibility for sound recording and for the sound recording business. But the interactions between recording experts and the technology shaped the course of the recording sessions in particular and of the music industry in general. Let's consider for a minute this hypothetical episode, imagined by a recording expert in the early 1900s who disputed in favor of the indispensable intervention of well-trained and phonographically-seasoned individuals for the operation of recording machines:

> How often is it true that Mr. A, for example, having just invested in an instrument [a phonograph], and being delighted with its entertainment, proceeds to invite his neighbours and friends in to hear it. They come and enjoy the bands, the instrumental solos, and the comic songs. Some one in the company, Miss B let us say, has quite a reputation among her friends for her singing abilities, and nothing will do but that Miss B should, for the benefit of posterity, make an imperishable record of her "show piece." Mr. A has never attempted to make a phonograph record before, and Miss B doubtless never saw a talking machine at such close quarters in her short life. But Mr. A says it is all right. […] And so the thing is done. Mr. A makes a pompous announcement, the pianist strikes the chord, and Miss B launches forth on her soul-stirring melody. […] Then the shavings are carefully dusted from the cylinder, the reproducer is put in place, and all eagerly await the result. There follows such a succession of ear-splitting shrieks and jars that at first the

[112] Jarzabkowski and Pinch, "Sociomateriality Is 'the New Black,'" 582.

> company is convulsed with laughter, but, on observing the deep mortification of Miss B, her friends join in an outburst of invective against talking machines, and unhesitatingly condemn them as screechy monsters unfit for civilised communities. So soon do they forget the applause greeting a song reproduced five minutes previously by one of the bought records! […] But if Mr. A and Miss B would devote a little time and study to the subject, they would in a short time surprise themselves and their friends by what they could accomplish.[113]

In light of their experiences with all kinds of musicians, recording experts did not hesitate to establish, as mentioned above, that in order to procure good records performers had to be able to adapt their talent to the specific conditions of the acoustic equipment. In a way, the experts' labor behind the scenes was similar to that of impresarios and conductors in the nineteenth century—making interventions on certain performative aspects with the aim of enhancing the quality of the aural renditions they were helping produce. As a matter of fact, just like in the fictional anecdote with Mr. A and Miss B, people used to clap and cheer before phonograph reproductions just as they would do in a live setting.[114] By the same token of purposeful intervention over sonic phenomena, the work of recording experts in the acoustic era certainly foreshadowed, as I established before, that of recording engineers and music producers much later in the century.[115] Nonetheless, as this story also makes evident, whenever things did not work well with the recordings, it was the technology, rather than the human talent, that was to be blamed. Not only blamed but, paradoxically, regarded as barbaric (or "unfit" for civilization) in spite of its perception as an indisputably modern invention.

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[113] "Record Making IV. Vocal Records," *Talking Machine News* (October 1903): 100.
[114] See, for example: "How We Gave a Phonograph Party," New York: National Phonograph Company, 1899, in Taylor, Katz, and Grajeda, *Music, Sound, and Technology in America*, 48–51.
[115] See: Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*; Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*, 95.

Miss B's friends' reaction after the phonographic fiasco also mirrors the predominant understanding about the affordance of sound recording in most scholarship on the matter. The virtues or shortcomings of such affordance are usually ascribed to either the quality of the human talent or the technology's capability. Histories of the phonograph usually celebrate, on the one hand, the genius of the male inventors who conceived and bore the machines as well as the excellence of the singers, conductors, and musicians who got to be recorded in the early days of the industry; on the other hand, the accounts of the material developments tend to be essentially, as stated earlier, narratives of technological determinism—larger discs allowed more recording time, more sophisticated needles provided clearer sound, or electric recording made everything better and the real business possible. In other words, if it sounded bad, blame it on the machine. Notwithstanding the veracity of the inventor's contributions, the musicians' skills, or the material implications of having larger discs, better needles, and electric microphones, both good and bad reproductions resulted from the kind of machine-human interactions taking place when making the recordings. Just as the experts would not have developed their craft had it not been for the conditions of possibility set by the machines, the achievement of sound recording and the thriving business that followed suit cannot be explained by the capacity of the technology alone. The "bought records" that pleased listeners like those invited to Mr. A's party in the first place were crafted along with the material potential of the acoustic mechanism by a few human beings who became "experts" in a field which standards were just taking shape. Thus, following the approach of Jarzabkowski and Pinch, it is clear that "the materials are themselves actors that inscript [*sic*] the possibilities for action" and that affordance is "a term for understanding how

humans interact with the material world."[116] Furthermore, the kind of human and non-human interactions that took place in recording laboratories at Camden or Havana resulted not only in the affordances themselves (that is, the sound recordings) but also in a mutual affectation. As much as the scouts tinkered with the technology and manipulated their gear as they pleased, their own ears were inevitably shaped by the technology.

More than any other sense, hearing was the primary means for recording experts to go about their job. They watched carefully for the proper assemblage of the various pieces in the recording apparatus, the performers' layout, and other human or material arrangements in the recording laboratory. But the most critical routines in their profession had to do with listening. By virtue of the specificity and uniqueness of their relationship with recorded sound, recording experts in the acoustic era developed particular ways of listening that focused more on the sound as captured and reproduced by the technology than on the musicality of the renditions. Similar to other spheres of specialized listening at the time in telegraphy or medicine, and prefiguring the listening profile of sound engineers later in the century, recording experts built a distinctive set of audile techniques *for* and *along* the fulfillment of their mission.[117] Provided as a different way of filtering and interpreting sound, I call this ability (or approach) *acoustic listening*.

In a way, Thomas A. Edison himself, even if not a recording expert per se, represents a paradigmatic case in this tradition. Instead of taking as a given the reputation of the performers or the popularity of the repertoire, the story goes, Edison based his talent-hiring decisions on what he regarded as good sound.

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[116] Jarzabkowski and Pinch, "Sociomateriality Is 'the New Black,'" 582, 584.
[117] Thomas Porcello, "Speaking of Sound: Language and the Professionalization of Sound-Recording Engineers," *Social Studies of Science* 34, no. 5 (2004): 733–58; Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 137–55.

Rather than judging the potential of a musical number for his phonographic business in light of its quality in a live setting, he was after those artists whose test recordings were satisfactory to his ears. For that matter, Edison continually refused to pay for big names or to hire musicians solely based on their fame as live performers or as recording stars in other companies. The list of celebrities he turned down included, for instance, the baritone Titta Ruffo (1877-1953), about whom Edison wrote in 1911: "I heard his voice on a Victor record and I would not put his voice on our new disc even if he paid me. His voice is attuned for a large place, like an Opera House, which translated on a phonograph and put in a home gives poor results."[118] Besides spending hours listening to records made by different companies (including his own), Edison used to hire musicians just to make recording tests so that he could determine what kind of repertoires, timbres, and sounds, "were most suitable for phonographic reproduction."[119] Hence, as reported by Harvith and Harvith, "Edison did not want to give the public what it wanted necessarily but rather what he believed it should have. In assessing singers and instrumentalists, for instance, Edison analyzed their tone mechanically, disregarded reputation, and found fault not on the basis of interpretation or musicianship but on what he felt to be excessive vibrato or tremolo."[120] Quite often, his methods caused controversies. He turned down or undervalued famous artists, favored others regarded by his colleagues as of lesser quality, preferred sentimental ballads over popular tunes, and even disparaged the music of Mozart.[121] His views also informed his approach to the business. Unlike Victor's systematic and rather costly

[118] Harvith and Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph*, 5.
[119] Harvith and Harvith, 6.
[120] Harvith and Harvith, 7.
[121] Harvith and Harvith, 6–7.

investment on print advertisements, one of Edison's primary strategies to promote his phonographs was through live demonstrations of their sound quality—or Tone tests.[122]

The relative peculiarity of these issues takes special relevance in the context of Edison's hearing impairment. For him, rather than a disability, his deafness was an enhancement. He claimed that, just like the phonograph itself, his ears were more sensitive to sound so that he could focus on the sounding properties of the performers without having his judgment clouded by their musicianship. By the same token, he frequently argued that, unlike other people, he was capable to perceive sound "from a mechanical point of view."[123] Evidently, many people around him did not agree with him and did not share his remarks about certain sounds or reproductions. For example, in the opinion of the violinist and conductor Samuel Gardner (1891-1984), one those musicians Edison hired by the hour to run tests, Edison "didn't know anything about music."[124] The inventor frequently disapproved whenever Gardner played expressively and with vibrato but enjoyed what, for Gardner's musical taste, was a performance "in a dead fashion." Their musicality and perception of sound quality was almost always at odds. The violinist had no choice but to comply with the demands of his employer, which sometimes included playing along with Edison's preference for a single modified instrument (such as a Stroh violin) instead of having a section of seasoned instrumentalists.[125] But it was not about hearing alone. Edison's engagement with sound was indeed, as Steven

[122] See: Emily Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925," *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1995): 131–71; Richard D. Leppert, *Aesthetic Technologies of Modernity, Subjectivity, and Nature: Opera · Orchestra · Phonograph · Film* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 97–164.
[123] Harvith and Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph*, 10.
[124] "Samuel Gardner," in Harvith and Harvith, 48.
[125] Harvith and Harvith, 48–49.

Connor explains, intersensorial. He not only monitored sound quality and sound distortion by inspecting "the grooves incised by the actively listening tool of the stylus," but he "would chomp on the wood of a gramophone in order to hear faint overtones that (…) were normally lost before they reach the inner ear."[126] Edison's listening was, in his own view and in light of his own methods, distinctive and superior: "The sound-waves," he declared in 1913, "came almost directly to my brain. They pass through only my inner ear. I have a wonderfully sensitive inner ear… [that] has been protected from the millions of noises that dim the hearing of ear that hear everything… No one who has a normal ear can hear as well as I can."[127]

I am not trying to say that Edison's sound assessments were accurate or that he had necessarily enhanced hearing abilities. However, like Beethoven and many others before him, he certainly listened differently. And so did recording experts in the acoustic era. Unlike Edison, their listening was not impinged by a pathological condition, but like Edison, their listening was informed by their in-depth experience with acoustic records and the mechanicity of acoustic recording. By virtue of their exclusive engagement with sound and around sound, recording experts operated under a different listening regime. Rather than the mere capture of soundwaves by means of a functioning apparatus, the affordance of recorded sound at the dawn of the music industry depended on the ability of recording experts to perform acoustic listening.

Do you remember the wispy threads of wax residue in the live footage of *The Immortal Voice*? As the recording stylus cuts through the spinning disc, this

[126] Steven Connor, "Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing," in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 169.
[127] "Edison's Dream of a New Music." *The Cosmopolitan*, 54 (May 1913): 798, quoted by Connor, 169.

surplus of wax is simply discarded. It is the material price for making the grooves, and by extension, for the whole operation of sound recording and sound reproduction. In a way, when listening for the sake of the phonograph, recording experts had to get rid of certain excesses of live performativity and musicality in their own ears. When making a recording, they knew better than anybody else in the room, that the piece was not going to sound in playback as it was heard when performed into the horn. Often times, they could even anticipate how it would sound. Sounds were not only captured differently; some sounds were not captured at all. Recording experts were aware of this as well as of the various kinds of sonic transformations via the transmission and transduction of sound waves. Obviously, they could not always anticipate how the mechanism could affect the sounds and were surprised, more than everyone else, with the reproductions. Yet, their labor demanded a different set of skills and a different listening disposition than those of the musicians. Just as the affordance of the grooves was fulfilled at the expense of wax threads, their acoustic listening came at the price of sound filtering. That entailed, among other aural maneuvers, setting their ears to hear each instrument and each ensemble in the context of their position relative to the recording horn rather than caring for the live musical situation, to prioritize timbre clarity over musical expressivity, and to continually demand from the performers that they played louder and louder. As peculiar as this appears to be, it was built upon the natural disposition of the ear to filter sound. We all filter what we hear in one way or another, intentionally and unintentionally, and for a variety of reasons. Recording experts in the acoustic era did this following the unique sounding properties of the equipment they were dealing with, and in doing so, they managed to access a specialized realm of sound perception. The surplus of sound threads they let go

was, perhaps, one of the most salient yet almost invisible outcomes of their expertise.

Acoustic listening encompassed multiple approaches to sound and sounding tastes, truly as different as recording experts themselves. Still, the materiality of the mechanism implied a shared listening realm in many respects. It comes as no surprise that in the electric era these recording experts were usually "accused of having 'tin ears'—a direct reference to the metal horn" and to the characteristically strident sound of acoustic recordings.[128] Everybody's ears—just as everybody's eyes—would eventually adapt and readapt to new and newer media and sonic formats, including talking movies and subsequent multimedia arrangements. Although notably forgotten by now, both the activities of recording experts and creative productions like *The Immortal Voice* certainly paved the way for the configuration of many listening and sounding practices that we now take for granted. Maybe, just as the wispy hairs of wax that were discarded from the spinning records, forgetting outmoded regimes of media perception is the inevitable price for the cultural legitimization of incoming trends of media engagement.

[128] Millard, *America on Record*, 262.

4.

What Happens When the Recording Happens?

Phonographic Artifices, Indexicality, and the Performativity of Sound Production

On January 20, 1910, Raymond Sooy, employee of the Victor Talking Machine Company, left New York City on the steamship Verdi, on course to Buenos Aires, Argentina. The purpose of the trip was, in his words, "to record a repertoire of native songs and orchestras for South America."[1] The preposition "for" may look strange but it is not a mistake. It accentuates the commercial rationale of the voyage—to sell the records eventually in the same countries where they were made. Sooy travelled with at least one more employee of the company. Their luggage included a portable recording machine, about five hundred flat wax masters, eight different horns, and three sound boxes. The hemispheric journey brought a variety of novel experiences, including the initiation ceremony for those crossing the equator for the first time—discussed in chapter two—and that Sooy registered vividly in his diary.[2]

The ship route took them to Salvador de Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and Santos in Brazil, and Montevideo in Uruguay. After twenty-five days at sea, Raymond Sooy arrived in Buenos Aires on February 14. The recording sessions began ten days later and allowed them to capture on wax a total of four hundred and twenty-four selections in just over forty days. According to the recording ledgers for March 2 we know, for example, that Sooy made twenty-five recordings with three different artists, Eugenio López, Carlos M. Pacheco, and E. Gil Quesada, and that these recordings consisted of

[1] Sooy, *Memoirs*.
[2] Sooy, *Memoirs*.

songs, recited poems, monologues, and “comic dialogues.” The ledgers also include information about composers, genre, instrumentation, the sequence of wax masters, and the kind of horns and sound boxes used in each recording. Based on that, it is not difficult to reconstruct the details of a particular session. That day began with the voices of Pacheco and López, accompanied solely by a guitar, singing a *cifra*—a genre in which two *payadores* [singers] are expected to improvise verses in a competitive fashion against each other. For the rest of the day the configuration of performers in front of the recording horn was very similar: one or two vocalists usually accompanied by a guitar. The cifra was followed by fourteen sung and spoken performances featuring either Pacheco alone or in duet with López. After that, Sooy made ten recordings of Gil Quesada in a combination of songs—mostly zambas and tangos—and different types of monologues. As it was a common practice for Victor’s recording sessions in New Jersey since the beginning of the decade, Sooy kept a detailed record of the equipment in use for each session. Since the nature of the performances did not change significantly throughout the day neither did the size of the recording horns, nor the sound boxes, nor the basic setting of the studio.

As much as both Sooy’s personal diary and the ledgers provide critical minutiae about Victor’s 1910 expedition to Argentina, the amount of unrecorded information is just unimaginable. Deliberately or not, many details were left out and therefore escaped the archive and the historical record; left un-inscribed, they simply vanished as time went by. Sometimes the incompleteness of the archive is the result of cautious efforts to avoid the preservation of certain memories or testimonies. Nevertheless, more often than not, these absences are the result of the impossibility of keeping a record of everything—just as the technology of acoustic recording could not capture many sounds at both ends of the frequency spectrum. Absences, silences, and archive

leaks are simply inevitable. Through Sooy's diary we also know that he returned to the United States on May 5 on board of the steamer Vassari, that he stopped in Barbados, and that he was impressed by the Volcano Mount Pelée, in Martinique.[3] Yet, the journal neglects to mention anything about other passengers on the ship, other members of the expedition, or about his activities in Buenos Aires during the week preceding the recording sessions.

In this chapter, I analyze the production of a set of acoustic recordings made in Mexico City by Victor in 1910, pondering their sounds, their inherent silences, and their elusive reproducibility. The making of these recordings implied that an important aspect of the musical experience escaped the grooves. As technologies of inscription, sound recordings somehow compensated for the limitations of musical notation; however, the very liveness—or eventness—of the musical event unavoidably escaped the recording horn. At the core of the non-reproducibility of a musical experience stands the contingent distinction between "live" and "recorded"—a distinction fostered by the rise of sound reproduction technologies. As Philip Auslander writes: "historically, the live is actually an effect of mediatization, not the other way around. It was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing representations as "live." Prior to the advent of those technologies (e.g. sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as "live" performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility."[4] Diana Taylor offers

[3] Sooy, *Memoirs*.

[4] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 56; see also: Steve Wurtzler, "She Sang Live, but the Microphone Was Turned off: The Live, the Recorded, and the Subject of Representation," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 89. It is important to note that Auslander and Wurtzler criticize what they called a traditional understanding of the difference between live and mediatized events in performance studies—but which I believe it is still a relevant distinction for the case of early acoustic recordings. Instead of the live/recorded binary, Auslander argues that, in the context of contemporary media, the liveness of live performances has become increasingly mediatized. Wurtlizer argues that rather than a destruction of the

an insightful perspective by establishing a difference between "the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (…) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge."[5] Based on these ideas one could argue that sound recordings are part of the archive, but that even if they capture instances of the repertoire, the embodied memory of any particular performance resists inscription. One can reproduce the recording but not the performance itself. As Taylor puts it, "[t]he live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive (…) Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it."[6] Just as the recording captures what escapes the music score, the liveness of the performance escapes the recording. In a performance, embodied culture and embodied knowledge are "transmitted 'live' in the here and now to a live audience," in a way that recordings cannot do.[7]

Nevertheless, I would argue that sound recordings still offer traces of and clues into such unique experiences. From the musical reenactment of the Incas' last emperor's funeral to the phonographic fabrication of the hectic sonic atmosphere of a restaurant to an indigenous wedding on record, in the remainder of this chapter I inquire into how sound recordings were experienced *in* and *as* performance. Building on the work and ideas of Frances Aparicio, Josh Kun, Alejandro L. Madrid, Jason Stanyek, Benjamin Piekut, and others, the driving question behind my analysis is "what happens when the recording happens?"[8] My argument is threefold. Instead of keeping

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aura, mediatization "reinstates the aura in commodity form" (p.89). As it will be evident later in this chapter, when I discuss the work of Walter Benjamin, I believe the panorama is much more complex.

[5] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

[6] Taylor, 20.

[7] Taylor, 20.

[8] See: Alejandro L. Madrid, "Why Music and Performance Studies? Why Now? An Introduction to the Special Issue," *TRANS-Revista Transcultural de Música*, no. 13 (2009); Frances R. Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures*, Music/Culture (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998); Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley,

up with conventional expectations around music and entertainment, the sound recording business in general and Victor's expeditions in particular fostered novel experiences of auditory realism based on the exploitation of the deceptive potential of the technology. Still, although the performative theatricality inherent to the production of these phonographic artifices was a defining feature of the early entertainment industry in general, the cultural scenario of Latin America posed a particular set of challenges for the production of acoustic recordings. Furthermore, in light of the conceptual fluidity of Walter Benjamin's notions of aura and trace and Alejandro L. Madrid's notion of dialectic soundings, I argue that the making of a recording entailed the performative configuration of either or both indexicality and non-indexicality—in regard to the inscription, transmission, and reproducibility of embodied culture, popular culture, listening experiences, and political resistance.

The Pursue of Musical Novelty

As we discussed in the preceding chapters, the technical knowledge of Victor's recording experts was often times taken to the limit when dealing with the random material scenarios of their expeditions throughout Latin America—not to mention the quotidian challenges of their labor in terms of language, personal interactions, and intercultural matters. Likewise, the extent of the repertoires they encountered along the way often stretched the limits of the music they were acquainted with. The nature of such musical encounters can be represented in a continuum that, on one pole, included familiar musical products, and on the other, "strange" music or performance styles that completely escaped the scouts' previous experience. Familiar products—

Calif: University of California Press, 2005); Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*; Alexandra T. Vazquez, *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Stanyek and Piekut, "Deadness."

similar to the music they customarily recorded in Camden—included short operatic selections and a vast array of instrumental music for wind bands, such as marches, waltzes, polkas, and so on. It also included songs and arias that, although sung in Spanish or Portuguese, often required an orchestral layout in the studio that resembled the disposition of comparable ensembles in the U.S.; sometimes, even with overlapping repertoires. It is not surprising that, in these cases, the studio-recording standards of established celebrities of the era, such as Enrico Caruso or John Philip Sousa's band, were the chief guidelines when recording similar numbers in Latin America. On February 6, 1910, for example, Victor scouts recorded in Havana the baritone-soprano duet of Emilio Sagi-Barba and Luisa Vela performing "*Dúo de la máquina*" [Duet of the machine], accompanied by an orchestra conducted by Pascual Marquina (Victor 64176 and 45293B). The piece was the Spanish version of a selection from *Die Dollarprinzessin*, an operetta by Leo Fall that had premiered in Vienna in 1907 and performed two years later in London and New York as *The Dollar Princess.* The 1910 recording in Cuba not only followed suit on the seemingly international popularity of the operetta, refashioned as a Broadway musical, but also on the various recordings of selections and "gems" from the same work in English made by the Vienna Quartet and the Victor Light Opera Company in New York and New Jersey during 1909.[9]

On the other extreme, musical and performative practices with which the

[9] See: *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, s.v. "Victor matrix B-8305. Dollar princess fantasia / Vienna Quartet," https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/200008373/B-8305-Dollar_princess_fantasia; "Victor matrix C-8229. Gems from The dollar princess / Victor Light Opera Company," https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/200008295/C-8229-Gems_from_The_dollar_princess and "Victor matrix H-146. Dúo de la máquina / Emilio Sagi-Barba; Luisa Vela," https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/600002314/H-146-Do_de_la_mquina (Accessed January 28, 2019). One month after the session in Havana, Victor scouts recorded in Buenos Aires a polka entitled also "La princesa del dollar" performed by the Banda del Pabellón de las Rosas, directed by César Sesso (Victor 62856).

scouts were mostly unfamiliar included traditional and popular musics that had little circulation beyond local communities, as well as spoken performances composed almost entirely of idiomatic language and culture-specific jokes. This non-familiarity was sometimes reinforced by the novelty of the instruments and timbres brought into the laboratories; in other occasions, the very same ensembles the recording technicians worked with regularly in the U.S.—such as marching bands—presented nonetheless unforeseen musical combinations in Latin America. An interesting example is "Funerales de Atahualpa," [or Atahualpa's funeral] a piece performed by the Banda del Regimento de Gendarmes de Lima and recorded by the scouting team of Frank Rambo and Charles Althouse in 1913. "Funerales de Atahualpa" is, in its first two thirds, a triste, that is, a mestizo genre from northern Peru that shares various music characteristics with other mestizo and indigenous musics from the Andes such as the *yaraví* and the *harawi*.[10] In triple meter and at a very slow tempo, this section of the piece exhibits a melodic contour built on a pentatonic scale along modal harmonic progressions in a minor key, with a predominantly nostalgic and sentimental mood, as is fairly common in these musics. Later in the recording, the piece moves into a "fuga de huayno," a much faster-paced and more festive section; the contrast is heightened by the inclusion of percussion instruments, although in harmonic and melodic terms it keeps up with the indigenous sonorities of the first section. To the scouts' ears, largely used to the aesthetic organization of Western music as interpreted by operatic stars and popular musicians in Victor's studios in the U.S., this particular performance may have sounded strange, and even "out of tune" or rhythmically disassembled at some moments. At the same time, however, their unfamiliarity with and potential dislike of

[10] Raul R. Romero, "Peru," *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 2 - South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*. Olsen, Dale A., and Daniel E. Sheehy, eds. Taylor & Francis Group, Routledge (1998), 477.

such musical styles was challenged by the popularity of those musics among local audiences.[11]

Somewhere in the middle of this familiar-unfamiliar continuum of musical practices there was a variety of comic and dramatic scenes with musical accompaniment. To a certain extent, these performances resembled concurrent vaudeville and similar forms of popular public entertainment in the United States, but at the same time they exhibited a multiplicity of unique local elements in terms of format, style, music, and subject matter. In the early days of phonography in the United States, comparable re-creations of various kinds were common products of the recording industry. These included renditions of famous speeches, reenactments of historical events, depictions of distant and exotic places, and even edited versions of murderers' confessions. According to Jonathan Sterne, this led to some kind of "media tourism" enhanced also by the photograph and film industries.[12] The practice of re-creating or reenacting events through phonographic media gave rise to a short-lived and hardly-ever-remembered genre known at the time as "descriptive specialties" that Sterne defines as "[s]omewhere between a contrived re-creation of an actual event and a vaudeville sketch, [that] offered their listeners 'tone pictures' of different places and events."[13] Forerunners of radio dramas, these recordings were in vogue from the 1900s through most of the 1910s, targeting primarily a middle class clientele. Descriptive specialties were indeed "sophisticated artifice[s]."[14] They had to comply with and make the best of the rudimentary technology of acoustic recording. Plots needed to be developed within three minutes, while music, sound effects, songs, and

[11] Borras and Rohner, *La Música popular peruana*, 25; Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round*; Miller, "Talking Machine World," 170.
[12] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 241–42.
[13] Sterne, 243–44.
[14] Sterne, 244.

spoken sections had to be interspersed strategically; everything had to happen at the same time and in front of one or two recording horns. A good example of such playful machinations is "Hungarian Restaurant Scene," in which four comedians, accompanied by a small orchestra playing diegetic music, simulate the interactions of customers and employees at dinner time.[15] Similar to these North American descriptive specialties in their comedic nature and technical production, but essentially different in terms of their cultural content and other nuances, the phonographic dramas that the Victor scouts found and recorded in Latin America were significant incidents in their pursuit of musical novelty. Let's turn our attention to a couple of them.

A Wedding on Record: Theatricality, Phonographic Artifices, and Auditory Realism

On November 19, 1910, in Mexico City, in the middle of the political turmoil that ignited the Mexican Revolution, Victor's recording scouts recorded the duet of Maximiliano Rosales and Rafael Herrera Robinson performing "Casamiento de indios, no. 1" (Indian Wedding, part 1). Most of the previous recordings of these two performers featured simply a guitar or a Mexican jarana accompaniment; nevertheless, on this occasion, a large wind band accompanied them. A variety of jokes and satires loom large in the scene. The recording begins with a conversation between a mother—impersonated by a male voice—and a Catholic priest. She informs him that her daughter is about to get married and requests his services not only to officiate the ceremony but also to arrange other logistical aspects of the wedding, including the music. She offers a few animals in exchange for these services, but the priest

[15] See: *National Jukebox. Historical Recordings from the Library of Congress,* "Hungarian Restaurant Scene," http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/4970

demands money. Once she pays, the priest agrees to begin the ceremony, announced by the ringing of church bells—a sound imitated by a cymbal—and the congratulatory voices of the wedding guests, performed most likely by the other musicians in the studio. Twenty seconds of band music follow; it signals the arrival of the bride, the groom, and other party attendees; as the music plays, the mother laments the event but rejoices with its significance. While the priest hurries the couple to approach the altar, a conversation ensues between the groom and the bride as the band plays a different music selection. The groom promises to love her while she confesses having second thoughts. Someone intervenes—probably the groom himself—to put the women at ease at the same time that the priest starts the ceremony and the band plays a sustained note to cue the listeners into the solemnity of the moment. The priest makes a parody of the invocation of the Catholic mass by singing a series of made-up words that combine Latin and Spanish, and concludes with the word "*Amén*" accompanied by the band playing again the same sustained pitch—mimicking the sound of a congregation when it comes together to sing that same word during a mass celebration. With that, the ceremony finishes, but not the wedding nor the recording. The bride's mother invites the priest to the party, listing all the dishes and drinks that will be offered. After that, party music takes over for fifteen seconds, giving room eventually for the guests to shout in disarray "*¡Vivan los novios!*" (Long live the newlyweds!). The complete scene unfolds in two minutes and fifty-two seconds.

Five days later, the scouts recorded again the duet of Rosales and Robinson performing "Casamiento de indios, no. 2" (Indian Wedding, part 2), the sequel. With a similar display of parodies, jokes, and conversations interspersed with instrumental music and brief songs, the recording covers the events of the party that follows the wedding ceremony—also in less than three minutes. To begin with, the bride's mother

hurries to check that everything is ready and in order to receive the guests, especially the pulque (a fermented drink) and the musicians. For the last matter, she negotiates the price with a man, named José Antonio, who seems to be in charge of the group of musicians. Once he sets a price, the mother angrily and sarcastically replies "Only that? Go and make your grandma pay for it," offering instead to pay with food and drinks, to which José Antonio has no choice but to accept. Following another shout of "*¡Vivan los novios!*" dance music takes over for twenty-five seconds, accompanied by various shouts indicating the actual beginning of the dance party. Once the music stops, one of the guests challenges the bridegroom to sing a song, which he does accompanied only by a guitar in a waltz rhythm. Being about how a male Indian whispered his love to the ears of his beloved one, the song seems to portray the newlyweds' own story. While the first part of the song is in Spanish, the second, the actual love declaration, is apparently in an indigenous language.[16] As soon as he finishes, dance music dominates the scene again for ten seconds, this time with the very popular tune of "La Diana"—especially known today for its common inclusion at the end of the famous Jarabe tapatío, or Mexican Hat Dance. At this point, someone asks the bride mockingly: "At last you are glad, right María Josefa?" to which she simply replies: "I don't deny it, it's just that I'm so embarrassed." After this, various guests push the *padrino* [godfather] to propose a toast. In his words, the godfather wishes that, when old, the wife may, like a witch, chase her husband through the rooftops, to which the guests reply shouting enthusiastically "*¡Que viva el padrino!*" (Long live the godfather!). Then, another guest asks the orchestra to play a "jarabe" (a

[16] According to Natalia Bieletto, the words in this part of the song may be in Tarasco (or Purépecha), an indigenous language spoken by some communities in the highlands of the Mexican State of Michoacán. See: Natalia Bieletto-Bueno, "'Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería': The Construction of Poverty in the Music of the Carpas Shows in Mexico City, 1890-1930 - EScholarship" (UCLA, 2015), 372–73, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6j8589fw.

traditional Mexican dance music) to continue with the party; this guest invites everyone to grab a partner to dance but arranges some specific couples for the first dance: the bridegroom with the godmother, the bride with the godfather, and himself with one of the mothers-in-law—considering that, as he says, he has "no taste." More music ensues, another of the popular tunes of the Jarabe tapatío. As soon as the music stops, two more shouts in a fashion of call and response—the second with a less enthusiastic response than the first, signal the end of the recording: "*¡Que vivan los padrinos! — ¡Vivan!*" (Long live the godfather and the godmother! — Long live!) and "*¡Vivan los suegros! — ¡Vivan!*" (Long live the in-laws! — Long live!).[17]

As discussed earlier, the liveness of the performance, understood as the display of embodied culture in a unique situation, unavoidably escapes the recording. Still, the sounding event, as captured in the material record, provides traces of performativity and popular culture. The traces of the performance in the recording serve, as the live performance itself, as a point of entry into knowing about the cultural practices that informed the production of the performance in the first place as well as its reception as a reproducible commodity. For that matter, I argue for an expansion of the categories of *performance* and *performer* in order to incorporate the recording session itself as a whole, including its various actors, both human and non-human. As much as in "Casamiento de indios" the musicians in the studio were the performers who spoke, sang, shouted, acted, and played instruments, the recording technicians, their assistants, and even the recording equipment also played crucial performatic roles for the materialization of the recording session.[18] In this vein, the theatricality implied in

[17] These Victor recordings are available for online stream through the Library Congress National Jukebox Project: The first part (http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/10305) and the second (http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/10307), accessed December 10, 2017.
[18] Diana Taylor's suggestion to "borrow a word from the contemporary Spanish usage of performance (performático or performatic in English) to denote the non-discursive realm of performance" and to use

the idea of performance is apparent in both the material progression of the recording session, and the staging of a wedding event in the form of a phonographic drama. In other words, as Victor Turner and others have shown, theatricality does not only account for a rehearsed staging—as in a regular play—but it also refers to the ways in which various embodied practices become ritualized behaviors or performatic scenarios.[19]

Turner introduced the notion of social dramas to describe the empirical units of everyday social processes out of which different genres of cultural performance derive, including rituals, theatre *per se*, and movies;[20] or for the same matter, comic sketches like "Casamiento de indios." Hence, Turner writes, "the 'force' of a social drama consists in its being an experience or sequence of experiences which significantly influences the form and function of cultural performative genres. Such genres partly 'imitate' (by *mimesis*), the processual form of the social drama, and they partly, through reflection, assign 'meaning' to it."[21] In one way or another, every movie or staged drama is informed by and crafted out of real-life social dramas and, concurrently, the theatricality of staged dramas often times shape the development of actual, everyday dramas. Thus, the sound recordings of "Casamiento de indios" offer an interesting glimpse into the interaction of various layers of theatricality and representation of social and cultural phenomena.

In this light, part of the answer to the question of what happened when the recording of "Casamiento de indios" happened dwells in the simultaneity of, at least,

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"performative" as a quality of discourse seems most appropriate here. See: Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 6.

[19] Victor W Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986); Philip Auslander, "Musical Personae," *TDR/The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 100–119; Serge Lacasse, "Persona, Emotions, and Technology: The Phonographic Staging of the Popular Music Voice," 2005.

[20] Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 92–94.

[21] Turner, 95.

two plots: the inscription of sounds on wax by means of acoustic technology, and the story of the wedding celebration of a couple. Both scenarios—the material setting in which the acoustic recording was made and the imagined church where the bride's mother talked to the priest—existed as historically and culturally specific configurations: the first in relation to the development of sound reproduction technologies in the early twentieth century, and the other associated with manifestations of Mexican popular culture in 1910. As such, these scenarios provided "sets of possibilities" and "ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution," that were "activated with more or less theatricality."[22] Nevertheless, Taylor also reminds us, "[t]heatricality strives for efficaciousness, not authenticity."[23]

The non-reproducibility of the liveness of the performance should not be mistaken with a reification of its originality or the assumption of an ontological authenticity of the live musical event in opposition to the deceitfulness of sound recordings. Sterne insists that a philosophy of mediation—and particularly the approach to the relationship between a live sound event and its mechanical reproduction as loss of fidelity—is but one possible way of conceiving sound reproduction technologies. Rather than assuming copies simply as "debasements of the originals," he argues that the causal relation that connects "originals" and "copies" is their shared artificiality;[24] from the perspective of sound reproduction as a social phenomenon, they are both artifacts. As much as the process of sound recording brings the copies into existence, it creates the sound event in the first place. The "original" does not exist "outside or prior to the process of reproduction" but both the

[22] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 13–14. It is important to note that for Taylor the idea of performance includes theatricality, but it is not reducible to it. In certain contexts, theatricality implies the controlled behavior of the political dimension in a way that performance does not necessarily imply.
[23] Taylor, 13.
[24] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 218–19.

original and the copy are artificially produced through the same process of reproducibility.[25] For the realization of an acoustic recording like "Casamiento de indios"—the first plot mentioned above— recording scouts had to navigate and frequently improvise through multiple arrangements. To begin with, the very task of capturing sound and accommodating a performance to the short time-range of wax masters implied continuous changes in instrumentation, speed, the individual components of the recording machine, and the physical positioning of performers in relation to the horns. All of this entailed various layers of intervention (or added artificiality) to the live event being recorded. Even more so, it can be argued that just getting into the studio produced artificiality.

In the light of these arguments, a third plot could be added to the "happening" of the recording of "Casamiento de indios": the making of a phonographic scene as a virtual artifice. Unlike the frequent narrative of fidelity in sound recordings, the film industry was conceived and perceived from the beginning as a practice of media production that heightened artificiality. In other words, movies were not grounded on the expectation that they provided faithful representations of particular "realities" but rather on the understanding that they were fabrications of certain ideas of reality based on the exploitation of the deceitful potential of the medium. (We know we are being fooled when watching a movie; that's part of the implicit aesthetic contract when going to the movies). *The Immortal Voice*, the silent documentary I talked about in chapter three, is indeed an exception in the film industry of the early 1920s for that matter. However, in spite of the widespread rhetoric of sound fidelity in the advertising practices of Edison and Victor, the potential of the phonograph to create deceitful and

[25] Sterne, 241; see: Stanyek and Piekut, "Deadness," 14–38; Wurtzler, "She Sang Live, but the Microphone Was Turned Off," 87–88.

virtual realities was also exploited by the same companies. Descriptive specialties and phonographic dramas are eloquent testimonies of contrived realities as aesthetic creations. It was not about a "mimetic art" aiming at faithful representations. Instead, it was about "crafting a particular kind of listening experience"; creating phonographic "realism" implied the operation of "a set of arbitrary artistic conventions designed to have a particular aesthetic effect."[26]

When listening to "Hungarian Restaurant Scene" or "Casamiento de indios" audiences knew they were not hearing "the real thing." Just as in the movies, these recordings offered fabricated scenes that felt real even if they were not. Interestingly enough, the awareness of the fabrication of reality accentuated the very realism associated with the technology. Even if seemingly rudimentary in historical perspective, the production techniques of film and sound recording were designed to make the technological intervention disappear in the eyes and ears of the audiences—at least momentarily. Thus, by furthering seemingly machine-free experiences of perception, movies and phonographic sketches managed to craft unprecedented illusions of reality.[27] As technologies grew in quality so did audiences' threshold of perception. Staged phonographic dramas in the acoustic era account for a founding moment in that history as well as in the history of the entertainment industry's exploitation of virtual engagements via reproduction technologies. As Peter C. Haney explains, these recordings "were meant to be soundscapes or 'slices' of aurally simulated life," and in that vein, they proved the potential "[to] simulate the aural experience of some scene and to give the listener a sense of being part of that scene."[28] To a certain extent, it

[26] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 241, 242.
[27] See: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 232; Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,'" *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987): 203–4.
[28] Quoted by Bieletto-Bueno, "Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería," 207.

might be reasonable to entertain the thought that such instances of auditory realism during the acoustic era foreshadowed the realm of virtuality and virtual experiences that permeate everyday life today.

Still, notwithstanding the production milieu of artificiality shared by "Hungarian Restaurant Scene" and "Casamiento de Indios," their circumstances of production and figuration within the entertainment industry were profoundly different. I believe that the consideration of the production of phonographic dramas in Latin America within the context of the cultural unfamiliarity of Victor's scouts offers a new perspective for the consideration of media production in general in the early twentieth century. As much as these scouts were skilled technicians on tour, they were also tourists—U.S. Americans frequently lost in translation and incidents of cultural misunderstanding. Thus, the specificity of the contents in many recordings was beyond their control, which furthered different mechanisms of production than those advanced in the United States and elsewhere.

Mexico in the 1910s: Carpas, Phonographs, and Popular Culture

We do not have surviving testimonies regarding the impression of hearing recordings like "Casamiento de indios" in the early twentieth century. Nonetheless, it is significant to note that the Victor 10-inch double-side record that included "Casamiento de indios, no. 1" on one side and "Casamiento de indios, no. 2" on the other (Victor 63236), was in commercial circulation for about 17 years, and that at some point between 1911 and 1928 it had already sold at least 6,129 copies.[29] Most of them, apparently in Mexico,

[29] *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, s.v. "Victor 63236 (Black label (ethnic) 10-in. double-faced)," accessed October 1, 2017, http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/object/detail/40226/Victor_63236. The information about the cut date and the number of record sales comes from Victor's "Blue History Cards," and that were used by the company to keep track of key incidents in the "life" of each record. According to John Bolig, as

although it is quite possible that the sales had been much higher and much more geographically extended. Moreover, Rosales & Robinson had already recorded both parts of "Casamiento de Indios" for Columbia Records a few years before, and just like Victor would do later, both parts of the sketch were issued in the same double-sided record (Columbia C150).[30] However, it was not only that a recording of "Casamiento de indios" was already available before Victor's 1910 expedition, but that the phonograph itself had been gaining cultural currency in Mexico for almost two decades.

Jaddiel Díaz Frene has studied the cultural history of the phonograph in Mexico since the late nineteenth century, providing substantial evidence about the of use and consumption of the machine across the social spectrum—not only by the elites. By digging into newspapers, advertisements, judicial documentation, and other sources, he reveals the simultaneity of many phonograph-related processes in Mexico and the United States as well as the early circulation of phonographs and records in Mexico.[31] The picture of colonial subjects' bewilderment with the technology takes for granted, as Andrew F. Jones points out, "the culture of the colonial periphery in terms of its belated modernity vis-à-vis the metropole."[32] What is more, it does not do justice to the fact that the cultural "shock" of encountering the phonograph and other modern

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summarized by the DAHR project, "these numbers are not to be considered authoritative. It is likely that they represent a sales audit from a specific time; they do not appear to have been updated regularly. In addition, it is possible that the sales figures may represent cumulative sales from various issues (catalog numbers) of the masters represented on the blue history cards, and not exclusively from one such release." (See: http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/resources/detail/78)

[30] "Casamiento de indios No. 1" and "Casamiento de indios No. 2", *The Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings,* accessed December 6, 2017, http://frontera.library.ucla.edu/recordings/casamiento-de-indios-no-1; and http://frontera.library.ucla.edu/recordings/casamiento-de-indios-no-2. Unfortunately, the documentation is very scarce about Columbia's 5000 matrix series, recorded between 1903 and 1908 and in which "Casamiento de indios" appeared. (See: "Columbia Matrix Series, 1901, 1934", accessed December 6, 2017: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/resources/detail/137#AppB-ForeignLang). In her dissertation, Natalia Bieletto presents two different dates for the Columbia recording (1906 and 1908), and establishes 1908 for Victor's. According to the ledgers of the expeditions, however, Victor's recordings of "Casamiento de indios," took place on November 19 and November 24, 1910.

[31] Díaz Frene, "A las palabras ya no se las lleva el viento."

[32] Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001), 12.

technologies took place almost at the same time in Europe and the United States as in Asia or Latin America. Phonographs and records "traveled roughly at the speed of the steamships that plied colonial trade routes," while the new subjective experiences around being modern and the conditions of possibility that fostered these technologies ensued simultaneously in various parts of the globe.[33]

In early-twentieth-century Mexico, such simultaneity is apparent, among other things, in the contemporaneous fashion of Edison's business initiatives in the U.S. and Mexico.[34] Likewise, the expansion of the musical forms marketed through the phonograph—or the pursuit of musical novelty—was furthered as much in the United States as in Mexico and elsewhere. At the same time that Victor deployed recording expeditions across Latin America, its studios in New Jersey welcomed a multiplicity of new musical numbers, from ragtime, blues-inflected marching band music, and jazz to descriptive specialties and the performances of countless immigrants living on U.S. soil. The relative contemporaneity of the production and consumption of comedy sketches like "Hungarian Restaurant Scene" and "Casamiento de indios" makes a noteworthy indicator. Likewise, the access to and the massive consumption of phonograph products are important issues to consider.

The portability of both the phonograph and the records allowed for the fortuitous and contingent circulation of musical contents across places and social classes. In spite of music's potential to configure regimes of distinction among social groups, as studied by Pierre Bourdieu, sound reproduction technologies heightened previous dynamics of musical exchange between seemingly discrete social sectors. Furthermore, the materiality and portability of the commodities produced by the

[33] Jones, 11; Andrew F. Jones, "Black Internationale: Notes on the Chinese Jazz Age," in *Jazz Planet*, ed. E. Taylor Atkins (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 227.
[34] Díaz Frene, "A las palabras ya no se las lleva el viento," 270. See: Johnson, "The Jazz Diaspora."

recording industry played a crucial role in enhancing their affordability despite the financial disparities set by capitalism.[35] Phonographs and records were part of the diasporic and migrant flows across the U.S.-Mexico border in the early twentieth century.[36] Plowing through various judiciary cases involving phonographs, Díaz Frene demonstrates that, contrary to common ideas in historiography, Mexican working classes had considerable access to the machines and their music. The idea that the phonograph culture was exclusive to the elites is usually reinforced by the ubiquitous display of elite people in printed advertisements in Mexico as well as in the United States. However, such interpretation falls short in accounting for how these ads were also aimed at the working classes, let alone the fact that they were published in newspapers, magazines, and other printed material that reached far beyond the limited readership of the elites. Often times the horn of the phonographs in those drawings is literally pointing towards the domestic help. As Engracia Loyo suggests, it operated as an invitation to the members of the working classes "to buy products with prices that surpassed, many times exceedingly, their monthly income."[37]

Phonographs found their way to working class sectors in many ways. They were robbed, obtained in raffles of various kinds, or given as prizes by beer companies and other businesses to their clientele. More frequently, however, people simply crunched their numbers and got them. One should not take for granted that having low wages prevented people from getting high-end technology. Clearly, record companies and dealers did not restrict their business to the small market of elite sectors; rather, they devised strategies to increase sales and the social geography for their products.

[35] See: Katz, *Capturing Sound*; Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Timothy D. Taylor, "The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of 'Mechanical Music,'" *Ethnomusicology* 51, no. 2 (April 1, 2007): 281–305; Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
[36] Díaz Frene, "A las palabras ya no se las lleva el viento," 261.
[37] Quoted in Díaz Frene, 274.

To begin with, as it was also the case in the U.S., the price range of phonographs in Mexico expanded from the simplest to the most expensive models. One ad of Edison published in the *Mexican National Phonograph* in 1909, for example, offered machines with prices from 32 up to 275 pesos.[38] More often than not, though, as most people did not have the means to buy a phonograph upfront, local dealers devised renting programs, some of which even provided a way to eventually owning the machine. The various legal quarrels examined by Díaz Frene reveal that it was usually a win-win situation for the dealers. Even if people could not afford the installments at some point, as it was commonly the case, the phonographs could be sold or rented to other customers. Yet, it was fairly common for people to rob the machine, not return it, and even sublet it, and that is why there were so many judicial grievances. Sometimes, people rented phonographs only for special occasions such as weddings or parties, and still some others got them in forced auctions or foreclosure sales at reasonable prices.[39]

Although most of the activities of the industry and the niches of consumption were concentrated in Mexico City, phonographs and records found their way to various parts of the country. For instance, in 1910, the United States Optical Co. promised their customers:

> Outside of the Capital City, anywhere in the Republic we can make available to you the attractions of the great City. The popular couplets in vogue in all theaters; the famous pieces of the Police Band, or any other piece, instrumental or vocal, or the attractions of foreign music or of popular Mexican music, [all are available] through the phonograph. (…) We carry the latest phonograph models of the three well-known brands Edison, Victor, Columbia as well as the complete repertory of [musical] selections of the three brands. No one knows the pleasure that a phonograph can provide until having one. Nothing can make

[38] Díaz Frene, 282.
[39] Díaz Frene, 278–85.

the home happier than a phonograph.[40]

The consideration of all these matters is not conclusive towards determining the listening practices associated to the circulation of recordings like “Casamiento de Indios” or the nuances of their reception. Still, the broad panorama reflects the efficacy of the expeditions to provide musical novelty and to reach new markets as well as the relative success of Victor’s commercial ventures and the popularity of the performers. According to Pablo Dueñas, the duet of Rosales & Robinson was in great demand in Mexico between 1902 and 1912, and recorded simultaneously for Edison, Odeon, Columbia, and Victor. In a mix of acting, singing, social criticism, humor, spontaneity, and double entendre [*albures*], their performances are credited to be a sample of popular culture in Mexico at the end of the Porfiriato.[41]

Often times, when selecting the artists that they wanted to bring into the recording studio, the scouts played it safe. That is, they pursued those acts which were already popular as live performances under the assumption that there would be also good sellers as records. Examples of this strategy can be found almost all over Latin America during the recording trips. As Natalia Bieletto shows, the duet of Rosales & Robinson, among many other numbers, seems to have performed extensively in itinerant circus, puppetry spectacles, and in the Carpas variety shows —one of the most popular forms of public entertainment in Mexico during the early twentieth century. “Jocose songs, sainetes, brief corridos or sones, parodies and comedy sketches characterized their musical repertory. While sound records may have increased the fame of these musicians, most likely their acts were already widely

[40] Quoted in Bieletto-Bueno, “Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería” 199–200.
[41] Pablo Dueñas, “Retratos sonoros de la Ciudad de México,” *Cronicas de Asfalto* (blog), accessed October 1, 2017, http://cronicasdeasfalto.com/retratos-sonoros-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico/.

known by local audiences who frequently attended these venues of entertainment."[42] The extent of the venues where they performed, from the somewhat exclusive Circus Orrin to the working-class ambit of the Carpas, reveal the popularity of their show across the social spectrum.[43]

At least from the mid-nineteenth century, popular public entertainment in Mexico had played an important role for the congregation of individuals from different walks of life and social classes as well as for the display of popular culture and political satire. In particular, as William Beezley has studied, puppet shows were a key site for the encounter of members from different sectors of the society and for the presentation of a multiplicity of implicit and explicit cultural codes and meanings. That was especially significant during the puppetry show of *La Guerra de los Pasteles* [The Pastry war], popular during the French intervention in Mexico (1861-1867), in which the famous character of "El Negrito"—representing the Mexican people—defeated a band of monkeys that symbolized the French. Even if attending to different show times of the same spectacle, rich and poor Mexicans shared, nonetheless, a common understanding of several of the idiomatic references and the hidden political messages, unlike the French authorities that attended—and even enjoyed—the same performances.[44] Apparently, Rosales & Robinson were featured regularly at puppetry shows, and "Casamiento de indios" as a live performance was presented "either as a puppetry act or by the two comedians on stage."[45] In a similar way to *La Guerra de los Pasteles*, popular culture was on display in the ventriloquist representation of Mexican

[42] Bieletto-Bueno, "Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería," 203–4.
[43] Bieletto-Bueno, 203–7.
[44] William H. Beezley, "Cómo fué que el Negrito salvó a México de los franceses: Las fuentes populares de la identidad nacional," trans. Servando Ortoll, *Historia Mexicana* 57, no. 2 (2007): 405–44; See: William H. Beezley, *La identidad nacional mexicana; la memoria, la insinuacion y la cultura popular en el siglo XIX* (Tijuana, B.C. México; San Luis Potosí, México; Zamora, México: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2009).
[45] Bieletto-Bueno, "Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería," 205.

indigenous culture interpreted by Rosales & Robinson. Rather than tracing those performatic representations from the testimonies of contemporary audiences, as Beezley does, I do so from the traces of performativity in the sound recordings made by Columbia and Victor.

Unlike Victor's version, in the session with Columbia the duet began by establishing specific geographic coordinates for the comic sketch: "*Casamiento de indios en el pueblo de Iztapalapa, primera parte*" [Indian Wedding in the town of Iztapalapa, first part]. Although Iztapalapa has been engulfed by Mexico City and it is now one of the boroughs of the Federal District, it used to be an independent municipality—Iztapalapa de Cuitláhuac—which population in the early twentieth century comprised mostly indigenous peoples who spoke primarily Nahuatl.[46] Sonic indexes of indigeneity are pervasive in the recording, including imitations of accent and speech inflections as well as unmistakable musical quotes. Indeed, it is a mimicry parody that denigrates the cultural heritage of the indigenous groups and that underscores the regime of cultural hierarchies between the rural/indigenous and the urban/cosmopolitan realms in Mexico at the time. Nowhere is this more poignantly evident, as Bieletto also points out, than in the contrast between the "distortions of the Spanish language" as comically acted by the comedian impersonating the Indian mother of the bride, and the priest's seemingly unaccented and impeccable Spanish.[47] The mother's lines feature a series of apparent grammar incongruities with "standard" Spanish in the use of some articles, particularly with the frequent inclusion of the neuter article "lo" in places where it is not needed —as in "*te lo suplico*" or "*te lo vengo*

[46] "Tabla cronológica de hechos históricos de Iztapalapa en el contexto nacional y del Distrito Federal," accessed December 7, 2017: https://web.archive.org/web/20110722225242/http://www.iztapalapa.gob.mx/htm/0101090400_2005.html

[47] Bieletto-Bueno, "Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería," 205–6.

a contar." In the same vein, the actor emphasizes the mispronunciation of certain words that results from the change of some vowels for others, for example, when saying "*soplico*" instead of "*suplico*," or "*cilistial*" instead of "*celestial*." In contrast, the priest's grammar seems to be thoroughly flawless, and more evidently, the serene inflections of his voice in accordance to a "proper" interpretation of the implicit punctuation marks, radically differs from the undisciplined and somewhat random intonation of the Indian woman. Further into the recording, the contrast is heightened once again with the high-pitched and unfitting syntax in the voice of the bride herself. These differences appear more accentuated in the Victor version of 1910 than in the original recording made by Columbia. To be sure, rather than objective or self-referential descriptors, the words "standard" and "proper" account for contingent historical configurations.

Ana Maria Ochoa has established that as "knowledge acquired through the ear became increasing suspect" in Latin America during the nineteenth century, there was a "grammaticalization of the voice with the institutionalized deployment of ever more formalized ideas about appropriate forms of vocality."[48] Therefore, "speak well" became a central pedagogical project of "disciplined knowledge" focused on three specific areas: orthography, orthology (the ability of eloquence and good pronunciation), and etymology. Speak well, with a proper voice, was the *sine qua non*e of participation in the public sphere. To "have a voice" required to have a "proper" voice. As a project, such grammaticalization of the voice implied the "silencing of untamed vocalities that refused to submit to such grammatical acoustics."[49]

The history of this domestication of vocalities began, at least, with the "alarmist

[48] Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 165.
[49] Ochoa Gautier, 167.

tradition" that followed the independence of the various republics in the Americas—the fear of the fragmentation of Spanish language informed the institutional efforts to keep the "purity" of written and spoken forms. Formal training in articulation, intonation, and pronunciation was assumed as an indispensable endeavor towards the constitution of civilized bodies and acoustic spaces. In the words of Ochoa: "Elocution was the anthropotechnology that needed to be implemented in order to separate animal sensation from human sensibility (...) to produce an adequately eloquent person as one who transcends sensation through the cultivation of a musicality of the voice. (...) Voice had to be hominized through acoustic techniques that cultivated the relation between musical sensibility and grammatical rationality."[50] I do not intend to say that the practices of representation of indigeneity performed by Rosales & Robinson were driven by an agenda of domestication of the voice, nor that their performatic activities were necessarily invested in nationalist discourses of cultural homogeneity. Still, their ventriloquism of indigeneity and the mockery of indigenous cultural forms was certainly informed by the power relations and regimes of cultural prestige that loomed large in Mexico and Latin America at the time—and that still do.

Interestingly, in the second part of the wedding, the comedian playing the role of the bridegroom sings some lines apparently in Tarasco (or Purépecha).[51] The music that accompanies those verses, though, is from the song "El Perico," a popular jarabe from the nineteenth century, shaped much more after European-derived rhythmic and harmonic models than after any explicit contours of indigenous musicality.[52] Nevertheless, at other moments in the recordings, there are clearer musical indexes of

[50] Ochoa Gautier, 175.
[51] Bieletto-Bueno, "Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería," 372–73.
[52] Bieletto-Bueno, 210; Jorge H. Elías Art, "El Perico," in *Leoncillo Sabino* [blog], accessed December 8, 2017: http://eliasjorge4.blogspot.com/2012/10/buena-vista-ecos-de-la-guerra-iii.html

indigeneity juxtaposed with other hybrid musical forms. In both the Columbia and the Victor recordings, the piece that is played when the bride and the groom are walking down the aisle seems to be an instrumental version of the Mayan song "Konex konex," but somewhat masked by the timbre and waltz rhythm of the brass band in the studio. Similarly, other musical instances during the sketch include interventions referencing the street music of *chirimías*—indigenous or mestizo ensembles of flutes and drums—as well as brief quotes of jarabes and other popular dance tunes.[53]

Taking into consideration the material configuration of recording sessions in other expeditions—as described in detail in some recording ledgers—I believe that these recordings were made with Rosales & Robinson performing right in front of the recording horn and a brass orchestra behind them, providing the diegetic and non-diegetic music. Nevertheless, it is possible that they had had, instead of live musicians, one or two phonographs for the reproduction of such sonic interventions, although that would have implied extremely complex arrangements for the sake of synchronization. The mere consideration of this possibility, as unlikely as it appears to be, entails the consideration of the use of the phonograph for similar purposes in the live shows at the Carpas or the puppetry spectacles, and therefore, an additional challenge to the predominant view in historiography in which phonograph culture is portrayed as an exclusive treat of the elites.

Rosales & Robinson did not only make fun of indigenous groups. The performatic configuration of "Casamiento de indios" depended also on the mockery of the priest and to a certain extent of Catholic religion as a whole. The story depicts the priest as a greedy, gluttonous, and spirited-drinking character, and even jabs at the solemnity of the Catholic ritual by turning the orthodox Latin of Catholic priests' prayers

[53] Bieletto-Bueno, 208-09.

into a spring of made-up words conveying ideas about indigeneity, bad smells, and food. [*Casamientorum indiorum apestorum, musicorum atragantorum molorum, tamalorum peromnia seculo seculorum*]. Thus, the common unintelligibility of that moment in the Catholic mass is re-inscribed as a proliferation of intelligible, shared cultural meanings.[54] Other elements of popular culture in display throughout the recordings include the domestic tasks for setting the party, references of foods and drinks, the interpretation of couplets, and the sequence of dance scenes.

In her analysis of "Casamiento de Indios" Natalia Bieletto concludes that these recordings "render audible the lack of agency of this marginal group [the actual Indians of Iztapalapa] as well as the social tensions between social groups with unequal access to means of representation. The Indians characterized in both of these comic sketches thus remain voiceless and axiomatically 'subaltern.'"[55] It is true that the indigenous community of Iztapalapa and the duet of Rosales & Robinson operated within radically different coordinates of access to media representation. It was the comedians, and not a group of indigenous representatives, who were brought into the studio, and for that matter, who got to perform at the Carpas variety shows. To state the obvious, both the recording expeditions and the live shows were driven by capitalist enterprises in the entertainment business rather than by any kind of ethnographic agenda. However, that does not mean that the Indians were inevitably "voiceless" or that Rosales & Robinson operated along the same lines of exoticization and Orientalist misrepresentation as other political, artistic, or academic actors. As much as their comic sketch vilifies local indigeneity, it does so under a shared condition of subalternity with the indigenous and other colonial subjects. A shared condition that, in

[54] Bieletto-Bueno, 209–10.
[55] Bieletto-Bueno, 213.

a way, resembles the practices of political resistance associated with the performances of *La Guerra de los Pasteles* four decades before. Rather than isolated cultural processes, the production of these recordings were intricately related with processes of political emancipation. Or as Michael Denning puts it in relation to later recording ventures, "[t]he circulation and social recognition of vernacular musics was a fundamental part of this cultural revolution [of 'counter-colonial tactics'], as recording became a form of subaltern self-representation."[56]

I would argue that rather than "making audible the lack of agency" of indigenous communities in early-twentieth-century Mexico, Rosales & Robinson's recordings were primarily, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, fabricated phonographic realities. By crafting auditory realism upon mediated encounters with indigeneity, these records filled a marketing gap of "media tourism." Still, even if in tandem with the exotic drive, the entertaining potential took precedence. In other words, 'Casamiento de indios" was much more about telling a joke than about taking a cultural excursion into the realm of an exotic-Other. Crafting auditory realism by crafting indigeneity functioned pretty much like the ventriloquist who invents a voice for his puppet or the person who imitates other people's voices when telling a joke. Even if for a moment, the recording—just as the voice of a puppet—felt somewhat real, but audiences knew very well that they were not listening to the "real thing."

Aura, Indexicality, and Disjunctive Temporalities

The idea of the liveness of a musical performance, as discussed earlier, could be also read through Walter Benjamin's notion of aura. The way in which the unique presence of the "here and now" in a live musical event escapes translation into the recording

[56] Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 163.

resembles Benjamin's description of aura as "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction," and that Sterne reinterprets as "the unique presence in time and space of a particular representation, its location in a particular context and tradition."[57] However, it is very problematic to assume an equivalence between liveness and aura. As Benjamin presented it, aura is not grounded on a given time and space; rather, as a form of perception, it accounts for an experience of continuous receding and unreachability, emblematically captured in his characterization of aura as "the unique phenomenon [presence] of a distance, however close it may be."[58] Still, that very caveat offers a significant analytical potential for the cases presented in this chapter. It is true that Benjamin's analysis referred mostly to film and photography, but as I hope to make evident and as other authors have shown, several of his ideas carry crucial implications for the consideration of sound reproduction technologies and other media.[59]

As Miriam Hansen demonstrates, rather than a "stable concept," Benjamin's notion of aura "describes a cluster of meanings and relations."[60] Considering aura only in the light of the Artwork essay is a very narrow view of the concept and of Benjamin's work in general. Pondering it as an aesthetic category, or simply as the "mode of being of traditional works of art," is but one of the ways in which Benjamin conceived it; and for the same matter, the oversimplification of aura as being in "antithetical relation" to technological reproducibility does not do justice to the conceptual fluidity of the idea of aura in Benjamin's intellectual production.[61] If considered in the context of the various

[57] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 223; Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 220.
[58] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 224.
[59] See: Georgina Born, "Afterword. Recording: From Reproduction to Representation to Remediation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 286–304; Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 127, 130, 163.
[60] Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2008): 339.
[61] Hansen, 336–39, 350.

uses of aura in Benjamin's writings and of the wider intellectual scenario that informed his ideas, aura takes a much more complex meaning.[62] Rather than simply implying the opposition between the unique presence of the artwork and its massive dissemination by means of mechanical reproduction, aura entails the potential simultaneity of those two poles, and by the same token, the concurrence of the non-reproducibility of the auratic experience and the instantiation of an "indexical dimension." The primary feature of aura, as presented in Benjamin's Artwork essay ("the unique presence of a distance, however close it may be") accounts for "an essential inapproachability and unavailability, related to an irrecuperable absence or loss."[63] In this light, while making the recording of "Casamiento de indios" implied the impossibility of capturing the embodied culture that was intrinsic to the live performance, listening to it made manifest the non-reproducibility of embodied memory. Or put in another way, in accordance with Diana Taylor's aforementioned ideas, the very fixation of Rosales and Robinson's performance on wax revealed the *archive*'s incapability to either access or transmit the *repertoire.*

At the same time, however, aura fosters an indexical dimension vis-à-vis the traces left by the live event in the recording. Hansen writes: "The indexical dimension of aura's relation to the past is not necessarily a matter of continuity or tradition; more often than not, it is a past whose ghostly apparition projects into the present and (to

[62] The first definition of aura appears in Benjamin's "A Short History of Photography" (1931) as: "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, however near it might be,", which is almost taken verbatim, five years later, in the Artwork essay: "the unique phenomenon [appearance] of a distance, however close it might be." Then, in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1940) Benjamin refers to aura as a form of perception in which a phenomenon is invested with the "ability to look back at us," or "lift its gaze." Miriam Hansen has documented the various currents that informed Benjamin's engagement and development of the notion of aura, including esoteric thought —and particularly the idea of aura as an encapsulation of individuality and authenticity— poetry, various German intellectual circles, Jewish mysticism and theology, among others. See: Hansen, 339–40, 343, 360–74; Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience," 183–87; Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 59–77.
[63] Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 344.

invoke Ronald Barthes) 'wounds' the beholder."[64] Or the listener, taking into account that, as Hansen also explains, aura "pertains to the *medium* of perception," and as such it is not limited to the visual.[65] By virtue of this indexical dimension, auratic experiences can potentially take the form of encounters with the past via reproduction technologies. Aura is neither grounded in the past nor disconnected from the present. Rather, it unveils a "disjunctive temporality," manifest, among other features, in "its sudden and fleeting disruption of linear time [and] its uncanny linkage of past and future."[66] Just as aura and technological reproduction are not necessarily mutually exclusive terms, such features of aura's disjunctive temporality "are articulated through, rather than in mere opposition to, the technological media."[67] These ideas may offer a new perspective to consider the multiple testimonies of people perceiving a "real presence" in phonographic auditions, from Edison's Tone Tests in the early twentieth century to today's accounts of individuals grasping a less distanced relationship to acoustic recordings from one hundred years ago than to current products of "high fidelity."[68] Rather than mere episodes of mass delusion in the case of Edison's tests, or byproducts of nostalgia for listeners nowadays, these auditory experiences seem to reveal auratic (or audiotopic) instances of encounters with the past—or nexus across disjunctive temporalities—by means of sound recordings.[69]

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[64] Hansen, 341.
[65] Hansen, 348, 373.
[66] Hansen, 346-347.
[67] Hansen, 346-347, 375. See: Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*, 22, 30–35.
[68] See: Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity"; Leppert, *Aesthetic Technologies of Modernity, Subjectivity, and Nature*, 97–164.; Stanyek and Piekut, "Deadness," 14–17.
[69] Tone or Realism Tests were a marketing strategy advanced by Thomas A. Edison between 1915 and 1925. In general, tone tests included a live performance of a human artist in tandem with an Edison Phonograph (after the release of Edison Diamond Disc in 1914). It was quite an organized and planned show: artist and phonograph performing together, with the artist stopping sometimes, coming in and out of stage while lights came in and out so that people would be amazed by not being able to distinguish the difference. Sometimes, the phonograph began alone, and the artist joined after or left the stage and the phonograph ended on its own. In other occasions, the phonograph provided the orchestral accompaniment for the performer, or the singer/instrumentalist simply sang/played in unison. Some of these the tests were

Sometimes, Benjamin presented "aura" and "trace" as overlapping, almost interchangeable terms. That is particularly evident, for example, whenever Benjamin "pursued the paradoxical entwinement of distance and nearness" in relation to the simultaneity of different regimes of perception.[70] Other times, however, he portrayed them as stark opposites, as in this entry in *The Arcades Project*: "Trace and aura. The trace is the appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind might be. The aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us."[71] From this perspective, aura's conceptual fluidity allows us to account for the simultaneity of indexical and non-indexical elements associated with the recording and reproduction of phonographic dramas like "Casamiento de indios" and several other records produced during the acoustic era.

In particular, such simultaneity—or ambiguity—operates in at least four different ways: first, as mentioned above, the potential of the technology to foster, at the same time, the inaccessibility to the liveness of the performance and the production of phenomenological and indexical traces of such unique event. Second, it shows the coexistence of forgery and authenticity in the performatic process of making the

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actual "concerts" with certain allure of high culture and featured the best and most famous of Edison's artists; admission was usually free and the attendance could reach hundreds and even a few thousands, filling theatres and emblematic venues like Carnegie Hall (in NYC) or Symphony Hall (in Boston). The majority of tests, however, were held locally, organized by dealers in small venues such as high school auditoriums or churches with less prominent artists joining the phonograph but with strict regulations about the spectacle set by the company. For the most part, Edison didn't have as many prominent artists as Victor did. Edison considered it was a waste of money to pay for "names," and simply pursued, instead, voices and sounds that recorded well. Thus, while Victor focused on the exclusivity and renown of its artists as a primary marketing strategy, Edison emphasized the sound fidelity of his machines. As a result, even though the acoustic quality of Edison's phonographs was superior than Victor's, especially since the Diamond Disc, the commercial activities of Victor proved to be, in the long run, much more profitable than those of Edison. Thomas A. Edison sponsored more than 4,000 tone tests between 1915 and 1920 and claimed that up to 2 million people attended the demonstrations. (See: Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity," 131–53.

[70] Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 354–55.

[71] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf. Tiedemann (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 447.

recording. As much as “Casamiento de indios” is a deliberately contrived and staged phonographic drama, such contrivance is built on the basis of unmistaken elements of Mexican popular culture in the early twentieth century. The story and the characters in the sketch are indeed fictitious, and the artificiality of the conversations and of the spoken lines is heightened by their presentation in rhymed, octosyllabic verses and hemistiches. Yet, the cultural scenario on display, and with it, the meanings associated with the roles and actions of the characters, the jokes, the soundscape, the music, the accents, the references to material culture such as food or musical instruments, the ideas about kinship, the idiomatic expressions, and the story itself, among many other elements encapsulated in the recording, were not foreign or unfamiliar at all to Mexican listeners at the time—an issue to which I will return later.[72] Here, Turner’s ideas about the capacity of performative genres to imitate the procedural development of social dramas, introduced earlier in this chapter, seem to reinforce the point.

Third, the fluidity of aura and trace in the realm of auditory perception may account also for the transhistorical fluidity of phonographic auditions, that is, the concurrence of the awareness of the deceptive nature of the phonograph as a medium for the transmission of contrived realities with the uncanny, almost metaphysical linkage of past, present, and future fostered by mechanical reproducibility. And fourth, the very rationale behind the realization of the recording expeditions seems to reflect the complex auratic setting associated with the acoustic phonograph. Traveling overseas with a bulk of recording equipment, setting makeshift studios, and recruiting unforeseen musical numbers for their preservation on wax implied, at least, two seemingly contradictory aims: capturing sound for the sake of its repeatability, and seizing the unreproducible—yet traceable—uniqueness of the “here and now” in a

[72] Bieletto-Bueno, “Es siempre preferible la carpa a la pulquería,” 204–13.

musical performance. To be sure, both aims proved to be crucial in the quest of musical novelty and the expansion of the phonograph business.

We should not lose sight of the political overtones surrounding Benjamin's work, especially his notion of aura. In the Artwork essay, Benjamin introduces aura in relation to the aesthetic realm of art. Being that this piece is arguably one of the most widely read of his intellectual production, it is common to assume aura as pertaining exclusively to the dominion of art. But that is certainly not the case. Rather, associating aura with art in that particular essay was Benjamin's strategy to detach the concept from esoteric notions and render it more secular and operational within material, historical, and political approaches. In that way, by historicizing aura as a phenomenon in decline and "a historical index of pastness," Benjamin advanced two critical arguments. On the one hand, that the decay of the aura, by means of mechanical reproduction, implied a massive access to what was before the privilege of only a few. And on the other, that the cult of art for art's sake (or "*l'art pour l'art*"), as inherent to auratic works of art, was being transferred to the domain of weapons, war, and the totalitarian nation-state in the form of an aestheticization of politics—as dangerously performed by fascism in Europe.[73]

Thereby, mechanical reproduction technologies were to play, in Benjamin's view, a critical role. As the degradation of aura furthered the decline of both social hierarchies and the cult standing of the artwork, people's engagement with reproducible media had the potential to foster new forms of political emancipation—even if at the expense of self-alienation. The increasing importance of modern

[73] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 219–20, 243–44; Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 337–38; Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience," 182–83; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan, eds., *Mapping Benjamin : The Work of Art in the Digital Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

technologies for the masses and of the masses for modernity, made it the more relevant to take seriously into consideration the way in which mass reproduction propitiated new modes of perception and imagination as well as new expressions of collectivity. As Hansen puts it, "if auratic art has lost its social basis with the decline of the bourgeoisie and is rendered anachronistic by the new realities of the masses and technological reproducibility, it gains a heuristic function in Benjamin's project to delineate, by contrast, a fundamentally different regime of perception."[74]

Photographs, movies, and sound recordings brought people together in unprecedented ways. The nature of their mechanical processes of production and reproduction unsettled conventional configurations of time and space, rendering attainable the connection of eras and places as never before. Their global circulation as commodities not only united people across physical and social distances but foreshadowed shared structures of feeling and experiences with/of modernity. Moreover, the dynamics of massive consumption associated with the new perceptual scenario set by these technologies and media spectacles accelerated the decentralization of art institutions, expanded the boundaries of art itself, and instigated modern engagements around art in everyday, vernacular, and political scenarios.[75] Notwithstanding reproduction technologies' almost organic relation to capitalism, as palpable in the rise of Hollywood and in the imperial growth of companies like Victor, people's engagement with them entailed also a catalyst for aesthetic and political decolonization—even if often times the potential of those engagements turned out to

[74] Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 354.
[75] Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses," 68–71; Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience," 189–203; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Alejandro L. Madrid, "Renovation, Rupture, and Restoration. The Modernist Musical Experience in Latin America," in *The Modernist World*, ed. Allana Lindgren and Stephen Ross (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 409–11; Beatriz Sarlo, *Una Modernidad Periférica: Buenos Aires, 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, c1988.).

be failed opportunities of emancipation. Let's close this chapter with a consideration of those matters.

The Sounding of the Records

As discussed above, the production of the recording of "Casamiento de indios" was contingent upon the mockery and belittlement of indigeneity. Yet, its circulation and consumption made visible—or at least audible—such indigeneity, even if ridiculed, to a large segment of the Mexican society that, in pursuit of European standards of cosmopolitism, disdained anything that disturbed such aspirations.[76] Despite their marginality within the universe of commercial recordings produced in Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century, the phonographic performances of Rosales and Robinson played a crucial role in bringing somewhat to the spotlight a social and cultural sector significantly neglected in Mexico. The access of these sounds and this cultural milieu to the world of recorded sound entailed also, in a way, their access to a mainstream social scene that preferred to disregard its indigenous heritage. At the same time, these recordings made evident the derisive gaze—and the sardonic ears—with which indigenous cultural practices were perceived by the same mainstream bourgeois society. In this light, I think that these recordings operated as "dialectic soundings," in the sense that Alejandro L. Madrid gives to the expression.

Madrid suggests that emphasizing music's performative character is crucial to understand the implications of sound for the configuration of everyday life. Thus, building upon Walter Benjamin's idea of "dialectic images," Madrid has coined the concept of "dialectic soundings" to account for the way in which music and sound

[76] Madrid, *Sounds of the Modern Nation*.

events "always exist beyond the time and place in which they are originated."[77] It is about dialectical "soundings" (rather than "sounds") because the emphasis is placed on the action of performing—music as it sounds—and on the fact that "music from the past exists in the present as music," and not simply as a silent material vestige. What is more, just like Benjamin's "dialectic images," sounds and music are not anchored to the past but their performance makes them "present in the past as well as in the present and in the future."[78] The reproducibility of a record like "Casamiento de indios," as I discussed above, may foster an auratic encounter between the past in which the recording took place and the present—or the various presents and futures—of its reproductions; with both recording(s) and reproductions understood as performances in and of themselves. The happenings of the sounding event in both recording and playback modes—or its dialectic soundings—entail every time a disruption of linear time by triggering auratic encounters with the past and articulating possible futures of consumption and everyday life.[79]

Although the recordings of "Casamiento de indios" were made in Mexico City, many of their performatic features—including regional accents, characters, popular references, and stories—were an evocation of rurality and rural identities. Hence, listening to those recordings at the time fostered a mediated engagement with locality in at least two different fronts: on the one hand, the incursion of the phonograph to capture local manners, sayings, musics, and jokes in an entertainment industry

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[77] Alejandro L. Madrid, "Sonares dialécticos y política en el estudio posnacional de la música," *Revista Argentina de Musicología*, no. 11 (2010): 27; see also: Alejandro L. Madrid, "Transnational Identity, the Signing of Spirituals, and the Performance of Blackness among Moscogos," in *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. Alejandro L. Madrid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 186; Alejandro L. Madrid, "Rigo Tovar, Cumbia, and the Transnational Grupero Boom," in *Cumbia!: Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre*, ed. Héctor D. Fernández l'Hoeste and Pablo Vila (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 115.
[78] Madrid, "Sonares dialécticos," 27.
[79] Madrid, "Sonares dialécticos," 28–29; Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 341–47; Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 447.

dominated by foreign products; on the other, the importance of the antagonism between the rural and the urban realms in the course of the Mexican Revolution, in the second decade of the twentieth century.[80] The performatic composition of "Casamiento de indios" relied not only on a mocking representation of indigeneity but also on the reaffirmation of hierarchies of cultural prestige that divided the indigenous and cosmopolitan spheres in Mexico. Among a host of other sound recordings and other forms of representation, these sketches helped consolidate, in the arena of public discourse, the rural/urban divide and the structural resentment and antagonism that fueled the Revolution. This is not to say that phonograph culture directly ignited the Revolution, but it was certainly part of the material, modern, and symbolic universe that, in convoluted ways, nourished the insurrection.

Michael Denning suggests that even if the global dissemination of the phonograph implied a process of "colonization of the ear," the dynamics associated with the local appropriation of the medium and the exploitation of its potential eventually furthered not only a "decolonization of the ear" but also helped advance of other strategies of political decolonization.[81] Denning demonstrates that the intense recording season of vernacular musics between 1925 and 1929 in various parts of the globe coincided with the first waves of anticolonial thought and political activism in the same locals, and that there was a clear correlation between the content, circulation, and consumption of those recordings, and the mobilization—and even triumph—of anticolonial struggles almost all over the world. The phonograph, Denning suggests, was as important as literature and other cultural interventions against colonial regimes

[80] See: William H Beezley, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946: An Introduction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Douglas W. Richmond, Sam W. Haynes, and Nicholas. Villanueva, eds., *The Mexican Revolution: Conflict and Consolidation, 1910-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013); Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).
[81] Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 135–69; See: Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality*, 126–63.

in the 1920s and 1930s. In tandem with them, phonograph culture "was a herald of decolonization, part of a cultural revolution that made possible the subsequent political revolutions." Moreover, he continues,

> …the emergence of these musics—hula, rumba, beguine, tango, jazz, samba, marabi, kroncong, tarab, chaabi—*was* decolonization. It was not simply a cultural activity that *contributed* to the political struggle; it was somatic decolonization, the decolonization of the ear and the dancing body. Decolonization, I will suggest, was a musical as well as a political event. Moreover, this decolonization of the ear preceded and made possible the subsequent decolonization of legislatures and literatures, schools and armies.[82]

Music has been certainly embedded in colonial structures. The transnational circulation of music across imperial and commercial networks implies, almost inevitably, a colonization of the body and of the senses, not to mention the "civilizing" character implicit in the imposition and appropriation of Western harmonies, timbres, and languages. Nonetheless, as much as musical colonization—as exercised by colonial regimes and the spread of the phonograph—foreshadowed musical decolonization, the latter "preceded and prefigured political decolonization."[83] Sound recordings like "Casamiento de indios," "Funerales de Atahualpa," and many others furthered, in the early twentieth century, strategies of political resistance just as puppetry shows like *La Guerra de los Pasteles* did in the nineteenth century. "Even when these musics carried no apparent political meaning, their disruptive noise challenged not only the musical codes of empires and racial supremacy, but also the improving and uplifting ideologies of many colonial elites."[84]

It might be reasonable to associate Walter Benjamin's agenda of political emancipation at the expense of self-alienation with Michael Denning's sequence of

[82] Denning, *Noise Uprising*, 136–37, emphasis of the author.
[83] Denning, 140 See: 141-147.
[84] Denning, 140; Ospina Romero, *Dolor que canta*, 310.

aesthetic and political colonization/decolonization. As Georgina Born and others have observed, Adorno's dread of the phonograph's alienating effect takes a productive turn in Benjamin's thought; it paradoxically becomes the condition that potentiates new forms of critical engagement.[85] Put in another way, the modern dynamics of music consumption in the era of mechanical reproduction propelled an unprecedented scenario in which practices of colonization configured the conditions *of* and set in motion the possibility *for* strategies of decolonization. Ironically, the colonial ventures of commercial empires such as Victor's in the early twentieth century enabled sensory and political transformations among colonial populations, almost on a global scale.[86] Thus, making and listening to sound recordings, as a form of musicking during the acoustic era, entailed not only an engagement with what music was but also with what music and listening to music could do. Yet, the potential of something does not guarantee its fulfillment, as the developments in the political scenario of early-twentieth-century Mexico sadly reminds us.

The Mexican Revolution was a struggle against a dictatorial regime and multiple imbalances in a seemingly "postcolonial" nation, rather than a quest for independence against an external colonial power. Still, its development followed the lines of many other anticolonial battles—including the Mexican independence from the Spaniards in the early nineteenth century. Not only had the regime of Porfirio Diaz been in power almost uninterruptedly for nearly four decades, but his government reproduced many colonial patterns of elite exclusivity, unequal access to resources, and enclave

[85] Born, "Afterword. Recording: From Reproduction to Representation to Remediation," 287–89; Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 346; Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience," 222; Oscar Hernández Salgar, *Los mitos de la música nacional*, 217.
[86] See: Schenker, "Empire of Syncopation."

economies, just to name a few.[87] What is more, even though the political/military campaigns that led to the independence in the 1810s were effective in overthrowing the Spanish regime, the dismantling of economic structures, especially in terms of land ownership and taxation, was a much sluggish process. Thus, at the same time that the Mexican Revolution was a reaction against the recent social and political landscape, it was built upon longer and deeper structures of colonial domination.[88]

The dynamics of production, circulation, and consumption of recordings like "Casamiento de indios" are a symptom of the way in which decolonization—in terms of cultural practices and embedded performance—took place in Mexico around the time of the Revolution. However, unlike many of the anticolonial struggles of the 1930s studied by Denning, the Mexican Revolution did not bring about a real transformation in the political arena nor in the condition of subalternity and economic disadvantage of countless people in Mexico.[89] Although the rhetoric of the Revolution indicated the construction of a possible future of political vindication, in the end it was about a struggle among the elites to reclaim a sphere of power that assumed as their exclusive privilege. Thus, such a future never came to be and the Mexican Revolution ended up being a failed opportunity of emancipation for working-class sectors. If anything, it

[87] In chapter five, I discuss the idea of "enclave" and enclave economies in relation to the recording expeditions.

[88] Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *"We Are Now the True Spaniards": Sovereignty, Revolution, Independence, and the Emergence of the Federal Republic of Mexico, 1808-1824* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012); Will Fowler, ed., *Malcontents, Rebels, and Pronunciados: The Politics of Insurrection in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Deborah Toner, *Alcohol and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Beezley, *La identidad nacional mexicana; la memoria, la insinuacion y la cultura popular en el siglo XIX*; Beezley, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946*.

[89] See: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin. Hoare and Geoffrey. Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1999); Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary. Nelson and Lawrence. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge, England: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992), 275–331; Rosalind C. Morris, ed., *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

created more problems.[90] In spite of this, the marginalized cultural practices of these subaltern groups thrived and eventually made their way through other spaces. Phonograph culture was an alternative scenario to that of the political realm for the appropriation of the public sphere, the fulfilment of audiotopias, and the performance of cultural autonomy.[91] With the (dialectic) soundings of "Casamiento de indios" many things, undoubtedly, were happening.

What happens when the recording happens?

Over the course of more than two decades, Victor sent different cohorts of recording scouts to various places in Latin America with the mission of collecting local musics for their commodification as single-sided and double-sided records. As we discussed in the first two chapters, the original rationale behind the expeditions was the premise that by putting local repertoires on records, more phonographs were to be sold in those regions; and not only phonographs but also the massive amount of records produced by Victor in the United States. In the end, the records produced found many more destinations and commercial niches than originally intended. Therefore, the somewhat unforeseen effect of the recording trips was an unprecedented global circulation of local musics. To a significant extent, the success of Victor's corporate goals of global expansion depended, at first, on the capitalization on people's fascination with the phonograph, but once the enthrallment about the machine receded, the stability of its commercial empire relied on the unremitting provision of novel musical products. For that matter, the recording fieldtrips proved to be a fundamental strategy. Yet, the pursuit of musical novelty was not restricted to traditional understandings of music,

[90] Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940*, 261–70.
[91] Kun, *Audiotopia*.

music performances, or recorded music. The potential of the phonograph to reproduce newly crafted experiences of auditory realism opened up a creative window that, even if still widely unacknowledged in media history, would change the world of music and entertainment forever.

So, what happens when the recording happens? In the light of the ideas presented in this chapter, I suggest four possible answers to this question. First, making a recording in the acoustic era constituted an act of selective inscription. In other words, the materialization of a live performance on wax allowed for the capture and fixation of an instance of the *repertoire* in the *archive*. The recording did not imply the transmission of the performance's liveness nor of the embodied practices inherent to the performance, due to the non-reproducibility of the "here and now" of a musical event. Yet, traces of performativity and popular culture could still be found in them. The reproductibility of a sound recording entails the paradoxical simultaneity of accessibility and inaccessibility as well as indexicality and non-indexicality vis-à-vis the fluid conceptual relation between aura and trace.

Second, producing a recording was a performatic act that implied the staging and theatricalization of, at least, three plots: the mechanical inscription of sound, the musical configuration or dramatic narrative of the sound event, and the production of phonographic artificiality. To be sure, rather than an original-copies dichotomy, artifice and theatricality mediates the performatic production of both the live event and its mechanical reproduction. Third, the happening of the recording, by virtue of sound reproduction technologies at large, entailed the configuration of unprecedented auditory experiences. In the case of recording like "Casamiento de indios" it was not just about the familiarization with the new presence of acousmatic sounds but about engaging with a seemingly unlimited set of possibilities for virtual encounters via

phonographic media.

Finally, the happening of a recording nurtured a range of performative possibilities far beyond the recording studio. While the colonizing character of Victor's recording fieldtrips was somewhat flipped over eventually by virtue of processes that led to a "decolonization of the ear," these new auditory practices enhanced by technology came along with new discourses of cultural property and political autonomy. Although recording scouts were instrumental in an extractive economy on behalf of transnational corporations like Victor, and even though the payment that Rosales & Robinson received—if any—was nothing compared to Victor's profit, their cultural capital could not be inscribed, nor packed, nor stolen, and for the most part, nor transmitted. As hard as the scouts tried, they didn't get most of the jokes.

5.

The Sound Recording Industry as an Economy of Talent: Cycles, Modalities, and Tales of Extraction

In the course of over two decades the Victor Talking Machine Company managed to engage hundreds of performers in Latin America to record a vast array of selections for the company's burgeoning catalogs of foreign and ethnic recordings. As an extension of the corporation, recording scouts were invested in the colonial enterprise implicit in the global expansion of Victor's commercial empire. For that matter, their commission resembles other seemingly unrelated imperial ventures, such as the deployment of conquistadors to the Americas by the Spanish crown in the sixteenth century, or the excursions in pursuit of natural resources throughout the global South set by industrial corporations in the late nineteenth century. Victor recording expeditions were voyages of discovery meant to further an enclave economy based on exploitation of local labor for the extraction of an immaterial resource—music—in a material product—the record. The scouts' activities on behalf of a distant and absent imperial entity set the immediate plot for the production of what I call "orientalism on record" in the epilogue, which would eventually take the form of a series of metropolitan crazes around Argentinean tango, Brazilian maxixe, and other allegedly "exotic" genres.[1]

The imperial mindset that fueled the international expansion of the United States, and by extension of corporations with analogous delusions of grandeur like

[1] See: Said, *Orientalism*; Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*.

Victor, fostered a twofold engagement with foreign cultures. As much as they represented a host of potential consumers into the orbit of the U.S. market empire, they also offered a rich resource pool in terms of both the provision of raw materials for industrial processes and the ongoing development of novel products for massive consumption. In other words, although U.S. factories monopolized a good portion of the manufacturing and distribution of cars, razors, vacuum cleaners, phonographs, and many more industrial goods, there was always room for either or both the incorporation and the transformation of newly-found resources everywhere into existing or innovating commodities. Along with oil, copper, manganese, nickel, iron, cinchona, rubber, banana, and countless other resource endowments, vernacular musics and the ability of local musicians to play them were part of the universe of extractive economies that nurtured the industrial and imperial growth of the United States in the early twentieth century.

In this chapter, I examine the configuration of new economic regimes around musical talent in the acoustic era. I argue that the activities of Victor's recording scouts on behalf of a transnational corporation were instrumental for the configuration of a unique kind of extractive economy—one not substantially different from the incursions of other corporations in pursuit of natural resources. Setting up temporary recording laboratories and making the recordings was the first stage of what I will refer to as "the cycle of extraction," and which completion—before its iteration—entailed the industrial production of the records as well as a variety of retailing and branding operations on a transnational scale meant to consolidate and perpetuate a consumption habitus. The messy stories of the scouts' itinerant recording journeys, as explored in the previous chapters, offer an opportunity to bridge the gap between the histories of extractive economies—which

hardly ever take into consideration the music industry—and the histories of the phonograph—which have usually underscored the conditions of possibility set by the recording business at the expense of the examination of its colonial character in the global South.[2] However, as the chapter unfolds it will become evident that as productive as the analytical framework of extractive economies is to consider the case of Victor's transnational operations in Latin America, it presents certain problems and limitations. Such issues point also to the limits of resorting to political economy alone as a conduit for the analysis of the imperial dynamics in place with the extractive advancement of corporations like Victor. Thus, along with the consideration of the modalities of exploitation of people's labor, I examine the transcultural character of these imperial encounters as well as the coexistence of an economy of cosmopolitan desire with the economic interplay of capitalism. Thus, the following lines are organized in three sections. While the first two deal with the phases and implications of the cycle of extraction, the third section looks at the intersections of autonomy, transculturation, and aurality in the imperial paths of the recording industry in Latin America during the acoustic era.

The Economy of Talent

Considering the imperial configuration of the United States since the late nineteenth century, Matthew Jacobson has suggested that the various narratives about foreign peoples—in politics, science, and travel literature—furthered the idea

[2] See: Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*; Oliver Read, *From Tin Foil to Stereo: Evolution of the Phonograph* (Indianapolis: H.W. Sams, 1959); Chanan, *Repeated Takes*; American Folklife Center, *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, Studies in American Folklife, no. 1 (Washington: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 1982); Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*; Brooks, *Lost Sounds*; Cook, *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*; Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*; Attali, *Noise*; Katz, *Capturing Sound*; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*; Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*; Denning, *Noise Uprising*.

that it was essential to take advantage of the wastelands, resources, and local markets still occupied by savages and barbarous populations worldwide. That was indeed the imperial corollary of earlier narratives of manifest destiny. While referring to his travels through Brazil, for example, Teddy Roosevelt predicted that "the country when opened will be a healthy abode for white settlers."[3] Similarly, *National Geographic* made a series of reports about remote places, filled with photographs that fed the imagination about the economic potential of these exotic lands "where the white man can [also] live and thrive."[4] In a fashion comparable to the depictions of indigenous societies as noble savages in the eighteenth century and before, travelogues usually idealized the "barbarian virtues" of foreign peoples, praising them for their amicable relationship with nature, tranquility, uncorrupted lifestyles, and freedom from the impingements of modernity—while also lamenting the shortcomings and vices of civilization. These literary portrayals not only resembled discourses and representations advanced by anthropologists, but the economic rationale that derived from many of these narratives capitalized on the evolutionary paradigm that informed them in the first place.[5] Few images captured such mindset as clearly as one of the photographs published by *National Geographic* in 1917. It showed a woman from New Guinea carrying a baby in a sling hanging from her head, alongside the following caption: "This device is at a disadvantage when compared with an American cradle, but it is a touching evidence of maternal inventiveness and industry at work for baby's safety *even* in

[3] Quoted by Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 119.
[4] Jacobson, 120.
[5] Jacobson, 128–49.

the South Seas."[6] Notwithstanding *National Geographic*'s apparent aim to pinpoint cultural diversity, what stands out is the signal for economic opportunity—not to mention the implicit rationale for the political stewardship of the United States over such still allegedly "barbaric" scenarios.

In his speech for the first World's Salesmanship Congress, held in Detroit in 1916, Woodrow Wilson pointed out that the U.S. had two alternatives in its engagement as a provider of manufactured goods to the rest of the world: either to coerce the tastes and markets of peoples abroad to adopt U.S. products or, in his words, "to study the tastes and needs of the countries where the markets were being sought and suit your goods to those tastes and needs."[7] Wilson and his audience cheered for the second alternative, albeit it was not really a novel proposition. To a significant extent, Wilson's advice was a fair description of what the recording industry, and the Victor Talking Machine Company in particular, had been doing for over a decade in its own engagement with foreign peoples, foreign musics, and foreign markets. To be sure, the strategic accommodation of industrial commodities to vernacular cultural systems that drove the deployment of recording expeditions overseas and that informed the production of acoustic records with local musics predated the cross-cultural operations of Coca-Coca, McDonalds, and other corporations.[8] The expectation that, by providing records with local musics, people would be more willing to buy talking machines and other kind of records, and by extension, that it would facilitate the incorporation of foreign markets into Victor's commercial umbrella, was one of the main arguments for the upholding of

[6] Quoted by Jacobson, 174 (emphasis mine; the photograph appears in the photo gallery between pages 148 and 149 in Jacobson's book).
[7] Quoted by De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 1.
[8] Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 5; see: David Howes, ed., *Cross-Cultural Consumption.: Global Markets, Local Realities* (London: Routledge, 1996).

the Latin American expeditions for more than two decades. Richard Spottswood argues that, unlike today, recording companies in the early twentieth century were less interested in "weaning people's tastes away from their own ethnic forms and fostering a reliance on mainstream popular music;" rather than narrowing audiences' musical palates "into a litany of Top Tens, Top Twenties, and Top Forties," the early industry saturated their catalogs with detailed ethnic and stylistic categorizations.[9] Thus, the unremitting provision of new recordings was crucial for the business and so was the quest for foreign musics and performers. Among other strategies, sending talent scouts and recording experts abroad—with both roles, as we have seen, usually embodied in the same individuals—became a routine operation in the acoustic era. Although apparently less invasive and forceful than other industrial hunts for natural resources, the extractive nature of their mission was comparable to the extractive undertakings of other imperial-minded corporations.

As it was a common practice in Victor's New Jersey laboratories, the scouts kept detailed ledgers of their recording activities overseas, in which they referred to the performers as "talent." The rhetoric of talent was also pervasive in the promotion of Victor artists and records as "Victor's exclusive talent," throughout catalogs, advertisements, and other publications produced by the company. In 1907, for example, while announcing the introduction of a selected cast of new recording celebrities, an article in *The Voice of the Victor* began with these words: "It is impossible to stand still and yet go forward. Realizing how true this is and the boon new artists are to record sales, the Victor company has spared no expense or trouble in the search for talent *who* will mark up to the recognized standard of Victor

[9] Spottswood, "Commercial Ethnic Recordings," 61.

quality."[10] Rather than capitalizing on the notion of talent as an abstraction or as a discursive category pertaining to musical aptitude, for Victor "talent" was a marketing designation for musicians' labor. Talent encompassed both real people and their ability to play music—among a host of other phonographicable performances—and henceforth mobilized the capitalist maneuvers of the company around the world. For the most part, this marketing of talent operated on the basis of a politics of respectability that celebrated, just as Victor's marketing rhetoric in other fronts, recordings of classical music and other "highbrow" commodities—like the luxurious Louis-XVI-style Victrola. In other words, it was usually people like Caruso, Patti, Melba, or maybe Sousa—rather than the South American performers the scouts recorded during their tours—who figured prominently in the company's public discourse of "exclusive talent." Nevertheless, these Latin American artists also filled up the ranks of Victor's feedstock of talent. Victor's sound recording business was nurtured by the pursuit for and the commodification of talent everywhere; in other words, its economic growth relied primarily on the capitalist exploitation of the labor of local performers as a way to guarantee the ongoing production of talking machines and records. Victor was indeed a money-making corporation, but "talent" was its currency across transnational circuits of music consumption.

Clearly, talent did not mean the same for everyone or everywhere. It does not either today.[11] From Victor's standpoint, however, that was not a major issue—

[10] "New Victor Artists," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. II, No. 5, September (1907), 3, my emphasis; see: "Victor Exclusive Talent," Victor-Victrola Advertisement, *Life* (magazine), April 10, 1913.
[11] Lindsay Wright has recently argued that rather than a stable or objective category, "musical 'talent' operates [and has operated] as a floating signifier. Thus, 'talent' is granted a range of contingent meanings—as a constant site of discursive struggle." Determining what talent means as well as who gets to be considered talented (and why) has been a contested arena for various "conceptions," the most dominant of which "have operated as a form of discursive erasure, of historical and cultural silencing,"

at least not when setting up and carrying out the recording tours meant for the extraction of sounding events from Latin America. Embedded in the imperial imagination that drove the international engagement of the United States and many other corporations at the time, Victor managed to establish ephemeral yet efficient recording enclaves in almost every major city in the region. As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, recording scouts would prove to be valuable assets for the company, particularly in terms of recruiting performers and marshaling them towards the recording horn and, by extension, to Victor's catalogs and sales accounts. Setting up makeshift recording laboratories implied the configuration of temporary enclave economies, through which culture-specific notions about music, talent, or exploitation, if any, were bypassed and subdued to the capitalist agenda of the company. Or at least, recording scouts operated under such colonial coordinates. The extent to which local musicians managed to take ownership over these procedures was part of the discussion in chapter four and will be also a matter of consideration here later. But first, let's focus on the power imbalances that steered and sustained Victor's extractive enclaves.

Kenneth Omeje defines extractive economies as "'terminal economies' dependent on non-renewable and the seasonally renewable but exhaustible bounty of the planet's biosystems."[12] In turn, Margarita Serje has referred to enclaves as social and spatial configurations, the byproduct of supposedly "outposts of progress," that is, the localized exploitive interventions of large-scale

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and as a tool for the perpetuation of "unequal power relations within (…) systems of cultural hegemony." See: Lindsay J. Wright, "Discourses of Musical Talent in American Culture" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2018), 4–5.

[12] Kenneth C. Omeje, "Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Re-Engaging Rentier Theory and Politics," in *Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Multi-Regional Perspectives on Rentier Politics*, ed. Kenneth C. Omeje (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 2. See: Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

corporations—which have historically been the spearhead of colonialism, development discourses, and globalization.[13] Evidently, the conventional characterization of extractive economies in relation to natural resources seems to be at odds with the kind of activities carried through by Victor's recording scouts—as if comparing apples to oranges. Nonetheless, the extraction of sound by means of the corporate operation of recording technologies capitalized on and functioned in tandem with the same neocolonial milieu furthered by enclave economies based on the extraction of natural resources. Notwithstanding the manifest differences in the character of their businesses, Victor's recording enclaves had a lot in common with the banana republics of the United Fruit Company in Central and South America, the rubber enclaves of the Casa Arana in the Amazon rainforest, and other extractive zones in Latin America during the early twentieth century. In one way or another, they were all backed by an imperialist force and followed suit on the large-scale ambitions of their political counterparts. More importantly, they all built on the global south's structural condition of disadvantage in relation to its metropolitan pillagers—a condition unambiguously distinctive in Latin America at least since the sixteenth century.[14]

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[13] Serje de la Ossa, *El revés de la nación*, 210.

[14] As Eduardo Galeano, Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz and other authors have extensively discussed, extractive economies—and the metropolitan exploitation of natural resources in Latin America in general—were propelled by the globalization of trade since at least the sixteenth century but took on massive dimensions following the industrial revolution. Galeano in particular argued that the modern configuration of international trade and industrial production has been a corollary to the colonization and domination of most the global south by metropolitan powers in Europe and North America, as well as a crucial factor for the economic growth of these powers at the expense of the impoverishment of their former colonies. Moreover, that such configuration has contributed to the perpetuation of Latin America's dependency on a disadvantageous role of being primarily a provider of natural resources and raw materials. Notwithstanding the due critique that Galeano's history (and dependence theory in general) has received in light of their evident traits of economic determinism, the economic model inaugurated in the sixteenth century remains in many ways unaltered, while the prosperity gap between the North and the South becomes wider and wider. It is fair to say that, to this day, the economic aid flowing from the North—along with the ongoing extractive enterprises now under the opportunist flag of "foreign investment"—is still a way to perpetuate that relation of dependence as well as Latin America's underdeveloped condition and, ultimately, the structural imbalances in the international political-economic game. See: Galeano,

Indeed, the colonial practices of abusive extraction not only set the picture for post-colonial extractive economies, but they also set in motion the patterns of violence that usually come along with the appropriation of those raw materials. Omeje writes,

> To consign a greater part of the global South to dependencies for extraction of vital natural resources during colonial rule, Western imperial powers supplanted the autonomy and sovereignty of the peoples, communities and states they colonized and instituted a regime of impunity conducive to unaccountable exploitation and primitive accumulation. Forced labor, compulsory cash crop production, and delegation of sovereign power to transnational trading companies and individuals were all part of the regime of impunity widespread in the colonies.[15]

While the early imperial operations of Spain and Portugal in Latin America shaped the contours of the exploitative interventions in the region, the industrial agendas of transnational corporations in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries consolidated the condition of subordination of these lands to neocolonial enterprises. The original extraction of gold, silver, tobacco, sugar, salt, and ivory established by the Spanish crown was eventually supplemented with (or replaced by) copper, magnesium, sulfur, lithium, oil, and other minerals and hydrocarbons through the enclaves managed by corporations housed primarily in England and the United States.[16] In the imperial and expansionist mindset—for political or commercial quests alike—Latin America has been regarded as the frontier of the

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Open Veins of Latin America; Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*; Sidney W Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, N.Y.: Viking, 1985); Ankie M. M Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Farthing and Fabricant, "Open Veins Revisited: Charting the Social, Economic, and Political Contours of the New Extractivism in Latin America"; Farthing and Fabricant, "Open Veins Revisited: The New Extractivism in Latin America, Part 2."

[15] Omeje, "Extractive Economies," 2.

[16] Julia Buxton, "Extractive Resources and the Rentier Space: A South American Perspective," in *Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Multi-Regional Perspectives on Rentier Politics*, ed. Kenneth C. Omeje (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 202–5; Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, 191–224.

empire, that is, a vast space without an owner, filled with resources to be exploited or, as Serje puts it, the land of "pristine, wild, and available nature, inhabited by undesirable beings, that merely appear as a theater of shadows."[17] Just as European powers did in the sixteenth century, multinational businesses and local governments later denied, practically, both the presence and the ownership of native inhabitants in/over those territories, projecting them thus as "no one's lands."[18] Such provision constituted, in metropolitan eyes, the condition of possibility for the appropriation and exploitation of these lands with everything they had, from natural resources to human labor—including, of course, musical competence. In that light, as Serje also contends, "the production of difference is the result of the relationship of domination (and not the other way around)."[19]

The colonial regimes of impunity and lack of accountability were carried forward to the extractive enclaves of the early twentieth century. Entrenched in a rhetoric of the need for foreign investment, several Latin American governments gave a free pass to transnational corporations to exploit their peoples and resources, granting them monopolies over lands, mines, crops, wildlife, and forests as well as material and immaterial culture. By making laws to benefit their activities, or simply by allowing them to bypass legal regulations and customs controls, or not bothering them with laws and taxes at all, governments and elites were complicit in land expropriation, labor cheapening, murder, and even slavery.[20] In short, the

[17] Serje de la Ossa, *El revés de la nación*, 207, my translation: "Naturaleza prístina, salvaje y disponible, poblada por seres desechables, que apenas si aparecen como un teatro de sombras."
[18] Serje de la Ossa, 218, my translation: "tierras de nadie."
[19] Serje de la Ossa, 208, my translation: "la producción de diferencia es el resultado de la relación de dominación (y no al contrario)."
[20] Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, 225–83; Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Roberto Pineda Camacho, "El ciclo del caucho," in *Colombia Amazónica* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia-

roles were often times twisted so that, as Omeje puts it, "the transnational corporation was the state and the state was a mercantile company chartered by the metropolitan government."[21] Taking advantage of the immateriality of the resource it was extracting, Victor circumvented most of the political and public hurdles faced by other transnational corporations. It was not the same to gather musicians in an improvised recording studio as to invade the jungle and enslave entire indigenous communities to export natural rubber. Still, Victor benefited from the same political environment that turned a blind eye to almost all transnational enterprises and their exploitative, and often violent, nature.

As far as one can discern, Victor scouts did not kill anyone or engage in corrupted practices of labor exploitation at the frontier of civilization. On the contrary, their enclaves were mobile, urban and, in a way, cosmopolitan. Unlike the unlawful entanglements between local elites and multinational corporations that secured the social, economic, and political advancement of the first in exchange of the natural resources coveted by the second, Victor practiced a much more subtle and discreet, almost ghostly, kind of extraction. The usual operation was not strikingly different from that of a team of sophisticated, white collar thieves. Consider this. Two U.S. Americans travel to a city in South America in a steamship

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FEN, 1987), 181–209; Roberto Pineda Camacho, *Holocausto en el Amazonas: Una historia social de la Casa Arana* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2000); Serje de la Ossa, *El revés de la nación*, 211–18.

[21] Omeje, "Extractive Economies," 3. Omeje characterizes extractive economies in light of Rentier Theory in International Political Economy. "Rents," he writes, "are generally defined as exports earned or income derived from a gift of nature. They are said to be external to the economy because they are not derived from the productive sectors of the domestic economy but thrive by courtesy of international capital. The rentier state, on the other hand, is one that, based on the nature of its political economy, is largely dependent on extractive resources rents, taxes, and royalties paid by transnational companies (TNCs), and on profits from its equity stakes in TNCs' investments" (5). Often times, Omeje also explains, the theoretical framework of the rentier state—built predominantly on the actions of rentier elites or based on "state-centric explanations"—is not enough to account for the dynamics of extractive economies in the global South. Hence, some scholars have advanced the concept of "rentier space" in order to consider critically the actual areas—in geographical, economic, financial, discursive, or operational terms—in which rentier economies take place. See also: Douglas H. Boucher, ed., *The Paradox of Plenty: Hunger in a Bountiful World* (Oakland, Calif.: Food First Books, 1999).

from New York, bringing with them as many as 40 trunks filled with recording equipment and virgin wax discs. However, when they reach their destination, they leave all their cargo at the harbor and check-in in a hotel only with their personal luggage. They walk the city, visit music stores, attend live performances, and talk to some people in spite of their lack of fluency in Spanish. Precisely for this they secure, if possible, the services of a translator, who on occasion might be a native English speaker who is also conducting business in the city or, even better, a local musician with enough social capital and knowledge of the city's artistic scene to serve both as an interpreter and an ally for the recruitment of talented performers. Having collected their shipment from the dock—or, if in an inner city, having made arrangements from its transportation—the two travelers set up their first experimental laboratory in their own hotel room, being careful to conceal the recording equipment behind a curtain. Only the recording horn would thrust out. Guest performers come one by one to make tests and record a few pieces. Eventually, the scouts move their material paraphernalia to a different, more suitable location, such as a school or a musician's house, but the new recording laboratory is as extemporaneous and provisional as the one in the hotel. Schedules and routines become more systematic, or as efficient as the performers' abilities and discipline, and the communication between them and the scouts, allow them to be. After two or three months, the U.S. visitors are ready to head back home, taking with them as many trunks as they brought initially but now filled with recorded discs.[22]

[22] This reconstruction is based on different episodes from the recording expeditions, with many of which the reader may be already familiar after reading the previous chapters. It is important to note that this reconstruction—and in many ways this dissertation as a whole—privileges both the stories as experienced by the scouts and the company's perspective as preserved in its "colonial" archive. Part of the reason of this is, evidently, the nature of the primary sources that fueled a significant portion of this study,

The daily ledgers of the expeditions show that the scouts had apparently different standards of compensation for the various people they interacted with. It looks like the monetary value of their talent, if any, was determined on a case by case basis—scaling usually from paying nothing to paying a little. At the high-end of the payment spectrum, for example, Cheney and Althouse paid $100 pesos to the Chilean tenor Ludovico Muzzio for 19 performances recorded in Santiago, over the course of six recording sessions, between June 14 and 28, 1917. In the ledgers, the scouts took note not only of Muzzio's "very good tenor voice" but also of his forthcoming concert tour through the United States with the "widely known and well liked" Italian-Chilean baritone Renato Zanelli—who would also make recordings for Victor in New Jersey in 1919. The scouts also pointed out that "Columbia Co. [is] trying to get him," although it is not clear if they referred to Muzzio or Zanelli. But they added that "Muzzio says he is as good as [Titta] Ruffo," another of the transnational recording stars of the acoustic era, arguably as famous at the time as Enrico Caruso. While evidently Muzzio was blowing his own horn, the scouts made every effort to secure not only his recorded voice but also his exclusivity for the company. As they wrote in the ledgers, with Muzzio's consent: "The artist commits also to not sing for any other talking machine company for a period of 24 months (…) in consideration to the amount of $100 local currency."[23] But the $100 Chilean pesos were far from being a fortune. Roughly, it was

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including the documents and publications produced by Victor, more significantly, the recording ledgers and travelogues. While it is true that the documentation about these episodes from the perspective of the Latin American performers who participated in the recording sessions is scarce, to say the least, it is my purpose to dig into those histories and those testimonies for the eventual publication of this research as a book. I thank David H. Miller, Rebeca Harris-Warrick, Catherine Appert, Alejandro L. Madrid, Anaar Desai-Stephens, and Daniel Hawkins for their insight about these matters.

[23] Victor Recording ledgers (Santiago [Chile], June 14, 1917); González and Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile,* 183. See: *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, s.v. "Ludovico Muzzio (vocalist: tenor vocal)," and "Renato Zanelli (vocalist: baritone vocal)," accessed March 22, 2019: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/detail/13026/Muzzio_Ludovico_vocalist_tenor_vocal. https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/detail/28491/Zanelli_Renato_vocalist_baritone_vocal.

equivalent to the wages a field laborer in Chile would receive for 10 days of work—as it is possible to conclude from available documentation on work-related incidents—and certainly a small fraction of the income of a qualified worker at the time.[24] Still, Muzzio's case was probably an exception in the contractual arrangements between local performers in Latin America and the Victor company—or the scouts for the same matter. Most likely, for the majority of them, a monetary compensation was never part of the deal when recruiting them for a recording session.

And the same was true for the negotiation of copyright issues. Reading between the lines, and keeping an eye on the multiple miscellaneous annotations that accompany the registers of the performers and pieces recorded each day, the ledgers give the impression that, whenever they could, the recording scouts would get away with not paying honoraria or with taking away copyrights from the original composers. The defining criterion seems to have been the prominence of the musician in question or the musician's sagacity to negotiate those terms with the scouts. It goes without saying that, on top of all this, the scouts got away with the recordings. Such practices resemble the kind of deals made by the United Fruit Company with the different inhabitants, landowners, and producers of the Magdalena region in Colombia in which they set its banana plantations. As Catherine LeGrand has shown, the advantages and credits granted to their powerful collaborators in the city of Santa Marta contrasted with the harsh terms of their transactions with the "illiterate smallholders" of the rural vicinity of Ciénaga.[25]

[24] "Denuncia de Accidentes de Trabajo" [Report of accidents in the workplace], Valparaiso, Chile, March 7, 2018. I thank Josh Savala for the providing me with this historical document.
[25] LeGrand, "Living in Macondo," 340. On the operations of the United Fruit Company in Latin America and the Caribbean during the first decades of the twentieth century, see: Frederick Upham Adams, *Conquest of the Tropics: The Story of the Creative Enterprises Conducted by the United Fruit Company*

Founded almost at the same time, both the United Fruit Company and the Victor Talking Machine Company would consolidate massive commercial empires in almost no time, and would become the most powerful businesses of the planet in their respective fields. Just like the United Fruit Company "almost single-handedly created the world market for bananas" (with its Colombian enclave alone being by the 1920s "the third largest exporter of bananas in the world"), Victor managed to dominate a vast portion of the global music industry during the acoustic era and to produce enough records to reach "every nook and corner of the earth"—as one of the ads examined in chapter one reads.[26]

Victor's interventions in Latin America did not have a hint of the violence perpetrated against thousands of native peoples in the Amazon basin by the rubber business of Julio Cesar Arana, nor was it responsible for anything comparable to the infamous banana massacre of 1928 in Colombia.[27] Nonetheless, although its enclaves did not inflict physical harm, Victor's operations belong to the same colonial matrix of criminality, abuse, impunity, and lack of accountability as other transnational corporations. Just like them, it amassed a big fortune at the expense of the exploitation of talent as labor and the extraction of sound everywhere.

But it was not only sounds which were extracted. Since the late nineteenth century, as Michael Silvers explains, carnauba wax—harvested from the Brazilian

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(Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1914); Diane K. Stanley, *For the record: the United Fruit Company's sixty-six years in Guatemala* ([S.l.: s.n., 1994); Aviva Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Steve Striffler, *In the Shadows of State and Capital: The United Fruit Company, Popular Struggle, and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900-1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Marcelo Bucheli, *Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Peter Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*, 1st American ed. (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007).

[26] LeGrand, "Living in Macondo," 333, 338. See: *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VII, No. 2, March (1912), 8–9.

[27] See: Pineda Camacho, *Holocausto en el Amazonas*; Eduardo Posada-Carbo, "Fiction as History: The Bananeras and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 2 (May 1, 1998): 395–414.

tree of the same name—was in great demand for its utility in an increasing number of manufacturing process, most significantly in the sound recording industry. From the 1880s and through the 1900s, in the experimental and industrial processes that led to the establishment of carnauba wax as the most suitable material—or the crucial ingredient—for the production of recording and playback surfaces, the extraction and shipment of this kind of wax from Northeastern Brazil to the United States and Europe went progressively on the rise.[28] At the beginning it was particularly essential for the cylinders manufactured by the Edison company: "[c]arnauba wax was soft enough to capture acoustic and musical nuances and hard enough to withstand repeated uses."[29] Eventually, however, it became fundamental also for Victor and almost every recording company dealing with discs due to its suitability for recording wax masters—like the ones carried by the scouts during the tours. Thus, by the early 1920s, although carnauba wax was being exported in large amounts to record factories in England, France, Germany, Denmark, and Argentina, the phonograph industry in the United States had secured the largest share of it.[30] In this way, both natural resources and musicians' labor fueled the industrial impetus of recording companies and their money-making mechanisms. As Eldrige Johnson and the other executive heads of the Victor company became richer and the U.S. empire grew stronger and more powerful, musicians and audiences in Latin America kept witnessing the endorsement of new colonial powers and colonial tactics—not so different from those of hundreds of years earlier.

[28] Michael B. Silvers, *Voices of Drought: The Politics of Music and Environment in Northeastern Brazil* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 31–40.
[29] Silvers, 41.
[30] Silvers, 43–44, 160.

The increasing "corporatization of public law" that helped make a few richer and a lot poorer was not originated by nor exclusive of extractive economies. It was a phenomenon in place, at least, since the Industrial Revolution, particularly critical at the heart of the imperial metropolis themselves. Yet, although the burgeoning capitalist accumulation of corporations was a catalyst for worsening the living conditions of great masses in London, Paris, New York, and other industrial centers, modern extractive economies in the global South "created the necessary opportunity to drive this mercantilist tendency to its most pernicious conclusion."[31] Put another way, the idea of unbridled—or savage—capitalism is indeed much more than an apt metaphor to describe the operations of transnational businesses in Latin America.

It was not uncommon for transnational corporations at the turn of the century to use various forms of "pacification" as a way to secure the compliance of local communities with their extractive enclaves, that is, to keep complaints, protests, or unionization at a minimum while managing to get an ongoing provision of cheap (or free) labor. From the sixteenth and through the eighteenth century, European colonizers "pacified" entire communities for exploitative purposes through three interdependent mechanisms: evangelization, political intervention, and military campaigns—or extermination if needed.[32] Although some of these practices became less frequent in subsequent centuries, the idea of pacification did not really disappear. It mutated into new controlling strategies, often with the complicity of local governments, and to this day it has been disguised in a myriad of notions (and projects) around state-sponsored- or -mediated interventions in resource-rich

[31] Omeje, "Extractive Economies," 3–4.
[32] Serje de la Ossa, *El revés de la nación*, 140–42, 227; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

zones, meant to further the "democratic" inclusion or "participation" of local communities. In short, it only created the illusion that people's interests are being taken into account, while the pacifying and exploitative operations kept their own course.[33]

It might seem far-fetched to relate the practices and horrors of unbridled capitalism—as perpetuated by the United Fruit Company and other corporations at the turn of the twentieth century—with Victor's peaceful tactics of sound extraction. Yet, they all capitalized on the same structures of colonial dominance and imperial interventionism, on the exercise of various forms of physical and/or symbolic violence, and on the lawlessness of the places they invaded. The lack of legal precision and enforcement about copyright or artistic labor in most Latin American countries, in particular, was something Victor took advantage of. To be sure, the corporate rule of enclaves "reproduces the opacity of these spaces where everything is possible, since the disorder legitimizes any kind of intervention."[34]

Furthermore, the success of Victor's recording campaigns overseas did not depend only on the effective pursuit of musical talent. As the company's report of Cheney and Althouse's expedition to East Asia, discussed at the beginning of chapter one, and the stories registered in the recording travelogues make it clear, the fulfillment of Victor's quest for global markets entailed the exploitation of many other forms of labor beyond that of the performers. Local translators,

[33] Serje de la Ossa, *El revés de la nación*, 227–30. Serje has studied, for instance, the case of the so called "Consulta Previa" (or Previous Consultation) in Colombia during the late 1990s and the early 2000s, in which State representatives acted as intermediaries between "approved" corporations and local communities before launching new projects to exploit natural resources. However, the idea of a "previous consultation" was but another way to mask unilateral interventions and guarantee the continuity of extractive enclaves. In other words, rather than spaces of democratic conversation over the possibilities, opportunities, and implications of the exploitation (or extraction) of resources, these mechanisms of negotiation have purposefully meant to coerce the compliance of local actors and secure the resources in question for the well-being of foreign corporations.

[34] Serje de la Ossa, 225, my translation: "reproduce la opacidad de estos espacios donde todo puede ser posible, pues el desorden legitima cualquier tipo de intervención."

entrepreneurs, journalists, and a host of circumstantial "helpers"—such as the South Korean "dwarfs" that carried the scouts' many trunks on their shoulders—paid their dues, usually for free, for the inauguration of a new era for the music industry worldwide.

Retailing & Branding, or The Globalizing Counterparts of Recording Enclaves

The issue was not only about getting music from Latin America. The cycle of extraction was completed, just as with nearly any other industry, by selling the records back in the same places where the recordings had been originally made. In fact, as we have seen, the expectation that by providing records with local musics people would be more willing to buy talking machines and other kind of records was one of the main arguments for continuing the Latin American expeditions. We know that, even if not as substantial as the profit made with some artists in the United States, Victor's sales in Latin America were still considerable. As discussed in chapter one, although foreign and ethnic records could in general hardly compete in sales with the ones made by Caruso or Sousa's Band, Victor kept selling them and promoting them steadily in its catalogs. Selling as few as 1,200 copies of a recording still left a good margin of profit, and usually sales figures for foreign and ethnic records were much higher than that; there were cases of ethnic recordings that sold as many as 100,000—not to mention the almost two millions of tango records sold in Argentina alone as early as in 1910. Let's also remember that even a seemingly obscure product of the industry, like the recording of "Casamiento de Indios" discussed in chapter four, sold over 6,000 copies. And considering that sales registers in Victor's "Blue History Cards" were not updated regularly, it is quite

possible that "Casamiento de Indios" had actually sold more (or many more) copies. Even though Latin American records did not sell regularly by the millions, their commercialization was part of the same trading game as other records produced in the U.S. and elsewhere that could sell many or few copies.[35]

Although the exploitative apparatus of extractive enclaves was channeled significantly through either or both explicit and informal alliances between transnational corporations and nation-states, multiple operations took place around different territorial configurations beyond the state or that bypassed the state. As Omeje explains, these included, on the one hand, micro-zones—including the enclaves themselves—and with them various dynamics of micro-territorialization, provincialization, or localization; and on the other, "supranational forces of macro-territorialization [that] contend[ed] to disfigure and pull the rentier space upward towards supervised regionalization, internationalization and globalization."[36] In other words, as the globalizing trends of modern imperialism propelled the activities of transnational business and pushed against the sovereignty of nation-states, localized extraction and global trade became two sides of the same coin. As a matter of fact, it might be fair to say that Victor's commercial empire operated along those coordinates almost from its inception.

The efficient expansion of many U.S. businesses was achieved by means of strategic retailing and chain stores. In a way, this model was a response to another challenge posed by the rapid industrial growth in the United States towards the turn of the century. It was not only that overproduction was assumed to be merely a

[35] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 3, 12; Gronow, *An International History of the Recording Industry*, 30–31. See also: John Bolig, "Blue History Cards (BHC)" and "Number sold," http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/resources/detail/78

[36] Omeje, "Extractive Economies," 13. On the concept of the "rentier space," see note 21.

symptom of underconsumption, as we examined in chapter one, but that underconsumption was in itself believed to be aggravated by under-distribution.[37] By the mid 1930s, the main principles of retailing were somewhat of a common practice in the activities of U.S. businesses abroad, fostered in particular by the ideas of Edward Albert Filene (1860-1937)—a wealthy businessman who built his fortune out of the premise "that merchandising could be organized as rationally and efficiently as manufacturing."[38] From this perspective, the ingenuity of engineering a good product was but the first step in a commercial path that needed to be properly concluded with massive distribution and swift turnovers. In short, it was about shaping stores' offers and consumers' buying habits around two principles that conveyed, nonetheless, the same idea: "small profits, quick returns," and reduced prices but a higher inventory.[39] Moreover, this commercial philosophy was concomitant with the idea that, by shaping work routines around higher wages, shorter shifts, and more available credit, working-class consumers would be the main drivers of businesses' economic growth.

Notwithstanding Filene's innovations (and the fortune he made out of them), Victor's marketing practices certainly predated them. Although terms like "retailing" or "chain stores" were not frequent in the business jargon at the time, Victor invested a lot of its money, strategic planning, and corporate resources in matters related to distribution, marketing, and advertisement.[40] Along with campaigns and initiatives like those of "the Victor Traveling Department," meant to assist, "co-operate" with, and surveil dealers across the nation, and the "Victor College" for

[37] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 131.
[38] De Grazia, 143.
[39] De Grazia, 142.
[40] Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 114–24.

training in salesmanship—which we considered in chapter one—Victor purposefully offered talking machines and records in a wide range of prices, and kept a close eye on the way in which local stores around the world displayed and promoted its branded products.

In 1909, Victor created the "Window Display Department" which, besides crafting a catalog of exhibition templates that were regularly offered as an inspiration to the dealers-readers of *The Voice of the Victor*, mailed several sets of these "ready-made" window displays to merchants in the U.S. as well as in multiple countries in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.[41] Through the pages of its trade journal, with editions in both English and Spanish, the company regularly featured window displays in stores from almost all over the world, including places like Arequipa (Peru), Asuncion (Paraguay), Buenos Aires (Argentina), and Cochabamba (Bolivia).[42] There were many formulas available to showcase Victor products. One of the most popular was, apparently, No. 25 or "the Grand Opera Window," that could be arranged in various ways; one of them entailed the design of "a house with a door and 14 windows" in each of which it was supposed to go a picture of an opera singer from the Victor catalog, such as Caruso, Melba, Homer, or Scotti. The dealer was expected also to get permission to print the name of a "prominent" customer right on the door of the house, and to make a sign to accompany the display with a text along these lines:

> Mr. ——— is one of our many customers who has recently bought a Victrola. He has thereby not only secured the service of the 14 famous singers who are looking out of the windows, but hundreds and hundreds of

[41] "Victor Ready-Made Window Displays a Huge Success," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. IV, No. 5, September (1909), 4-8; "Increase Your Business by Making Use of the Victor Window Display Service," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VII, No. 3, April (1912), 6-7, 15.
[42] See: "La Victor en Todas Partes," *La Voz de la Victor*, Tomo II, No. 2. Junio (1916), 13-14.

> other entertainers who are ready at any time and as often as required to entertain him, his family and guests. Come in and let us explain how easily this wonderful result can be obtained for YOU.[43]

Likewise, the company regularly insisted that local dealers everywhere pay careful attention to the different aspects and matters of retailing. These included at least four areas. First, the presentation of the products in the store, and particularly the provision of demonstration rooms distinctively crafted for potential buyers of either talking machines or records. Second, a good supply of merchandise, up to date and inclusive of the variety of products and prices. Third, knowledgeable salesforce and strategic advertising, which also entailed the acquaintance with streamlined taglines and "selling points", the development of "personal efficiency" while dealing with different kinds of customers, and the practice of a gendered labor division in the salesroom. This last provision implied having salesmen selling the machines and "young ladies" the records—in light of the knowledge/experience expectations assumed for each gender. And finally, the uttermost attention to pleasantries and other "house" policies about the proper treatment of customers as well as an expedient system in terms of accounting, returns, and business information.[44]

But Victor's marketing strategies for commercial outreach were not limited to efficient dealership or customer satisfaction. Almost any scenario where a talking machine could be featured represented an opportunity for engaging more people into the company's trade orbit. For instance, towards the end of the first decade of

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[43] "Increase Your Business," 6. Other popular (and curious) displays described in the same article were the "Street Parade" of Victor artists, and the "Victrola versus Opera House tickets," in which the dealer placed a $15 Victrola next to a replica of a hall's proscenium, with a sign indicating that the cost of the Victrola was less than that three tickets for the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, and that no Opera House could offer the variety and quantity of interpretations that having a talking machine made possible.
[44] See: "Building Up a Retail Victor Business," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VIII, No. 4, April (1913), 14-16; "Keynote of Successful Retailing," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VIII, No. 12, December (1913), 4.

the twentieth century Victor began to sponsor a series of public concerts in the open-air, using a Victor Auxetophone—the large talking machine designed to play records much louder than a standard Victrola, and that we encountered in chapter three. "The influence of the Victor has been felt in every quarter of the world," reads an article reporting one of these events of "outdoor entertainment" that took place at the Whitword Park, in Manchester, England. As expected, the company alerted its dealers about "the money-making opportunity" should they take the risk of organizing similar demonstrations in their own towns: "What an advertisement it would be for you—and how many new Victor customers it would bring to your store."[45]

Public concerts like this were soon replicated in other parts of England, in the United States, and in Latin America. In Valparaiso, Chile, for example, the business of Curphey y Cía. used this strategy frequently to promote new records among its local client base. In a letter to the company, the Chilean entrepreneurs reported an "increasing interest in these musical sessions," adding that "the concurrence has been so numerous in the latest concerts, that our venue has been insufficient to contain the public."[46] The letter included the program of one of their forthcoming events, composed primarily of operatic selections, and photographs taken at some of those concerts portraying the "distinguished society of Valparaiso" that, elegantly dressed, partook of the occasions—a clear indication of the politics of respectability bound to the repertoire. (Figure 12). Often times, the performance of the Victrola was followed by live performances. The same business in Chile boasted about the participation of Renato Zanelli, the famous baritone mentioned

[45] "The Victor for Open-Air Public Concerts," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. III, No. 3, Mayo (1908), 5.
[46] "Los conciertos dados por la 'Casa Victor' de Valparaiso han tenido un éxito brillantísimo," *The Voice of the Victor. Edición española,* Tomo XI, No. 1, March (1922) [sic], 13.

above, as well as celebrated artists such as the Orchestra of Ernesto Davagnino, who "delighted" the audience with a "varied program" of popular dance music.[47] Despite Victor's apparent exaggeration of their success when reporting an attendance of up to 20,000 people for some of these events, there is no doubt of the efficacy of these talking-machine concerts to gather crowds and trigger the popularity of Victor's products (Figure 13).[48]

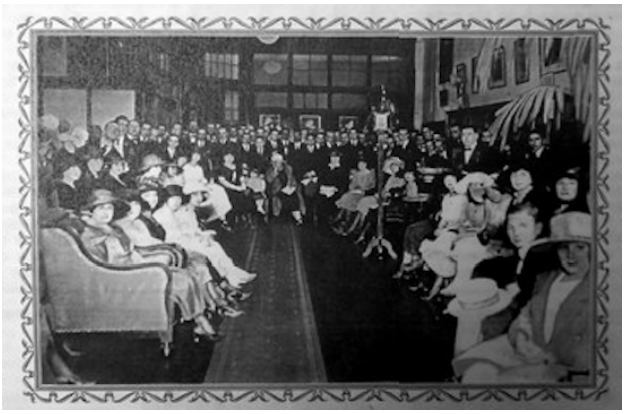
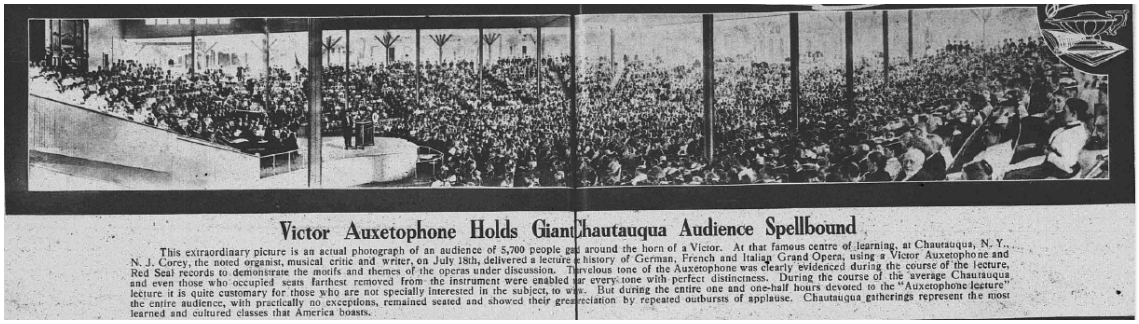


Figure 12: Victrola concert in Valparaiso, Chile, c.1922.
(*The Voice of the Victor. Edición española,* Tomo XI, No. 1, March (1922) [sic], 13).

[47] "Los conciertos dados por la 'Casa Victor' de Valparaiso," 14. This kind of combinations of classical and popular music in concert programs was somewhat common place in Latin America since the late nineteenth century and through the first decades of the twentieth century. In some ways, it was a way to legitimize the work of local composers in relation to their European counterparts as well as an attempt to imbue local music genres—often times refashioned as "highbrow" styles—with the respectability attained to classical music. See: Bermúdez, *Historia de la música en Santafé y Bogotá,* 107–8; Ospina Romero, *Dolor que canta*, 97–106, 123, 134, 303; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*; González Rodríguez and Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile*; Madrid, *Sounds of the Modern Nation*; Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela*; Juan Fernando Velásquez, *Los Ecos de la Villa: La música en los periódicos y revistas de Medellín (1886-1903)* (Medellín: Tragaluz Editores, Alcaldía de Medellín, 2012); Santamaría Delgado, *Vitrolas, rocolas y radioteatros*.

[48] The July 1908 issue of *The Voice of the Victor* included a supplement dedicated to the use of "the Victor Auxetophone in the Public Parks in England," with quotes from local newspapers that reported massive attendances of 10,000 and 20,000 people in a single event. Two months later, another supplement detailed similar concerts in Chautauqua, NY, New York City, and Philadelphia. See also: "Special Summer Opportunities," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VI, No. 4, July (1909), 3; "How John Wanamaker Interests the Public," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. V, No. 1, January (1910), 13.



Victor Auxetophone Holds Giant Chautauqua Audience Spellbound

This extraordinary picture is an actual photograph of an audience of 5,700 people gathered around the horn of a Victor. At that famous centre of learning, at Chautauqua, N. Y., N. J. Corey, the noted organist, musical critic and writer, on July 18th, delivered a lecture on the history of German, French and Italian Grand Opera, using a Victor Auxetophone and Red Seal records to demonstrate the motifs and themes of the operas under discussion. The marvelous tone of the Auxetophone was clearly evidenced during the course of the lecture, and even those who occupied seats farthest removed from the instrument were enabled to hear every tone with perfect distinctness. During the course of the average Chautauqua lecture it is quite customary for those who are not specially interested in the subject, to walk out. But during the entire one and one-half hours devoted to the "Auxetophone lecture" the entire audience, with practically no exceptions, remained seated and showed their great appreciation by repeated outbursts of applause. Chautauqua gatherings represent the most learned and cultured classes that America boasts.

Figure 13: Public Concert with a Victor Auxetophone in Chautauqua, NY before an audience of allegedly 5,700 people (*The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. III, No. 5, September (1908), Supplement).

By the same token, Victor made every effort to promote its Victrolas and records of every kind as educational tools, and to get teachers, schools, and administration officials to use and endorse its products.[49] At schools, Mark Katz explains, the phonograph was instrumental for a shift in musical pedagogy in the United States; if through the nineteenth century the emphasis was on making music, in the early twentieth century it was on music appreciation. Talking machines and special collections of records were bought by elementary/high schools and universities alike—including not only classical music but selections of foreign and ethnic musics from different parts of the world. Along spelling competitions and other memorization challenges, contests of musical recollection became commonplace in schools, just as textbooks on music appreciation and phonographs themselves became a less strange presence in the classroom.[50] In 1912, Victor boasted that "The Victor in the Schools is no longer an ambitious dream; it is an actual

[49] Articles, news, and reports about getting schools to use Victor products and their usefulness across various educational settings are abundant in *The Voice of The Victor* through the 1910s. See, for example, in 1912 (Vol. VII): No. 3, April, 4-5; No. 4, May, 10; No. 5, June, 10-11; No. 6, July, 6-7; No. 7, August, 6-7; No. 9, October, 8-9; No. 10, November, 8-9. And in 1913 (Vol. VIII): No. 1, January, 5; No. 2, February, 6; No. 3, March, 14; No. 6, June, 10-11; No. 7, July, 9; No. 8, August, 9. The Spanish edition of the journal also included similar articles and references, based on examples from Latin America. In 1922, for instance, the Colombian composer Emilio Murillo referred to the Victrola as "the best music teacher" [or "el mejor profesor de musica"], considering that, in his opinion, a peasant in the department of Antioquia had learnt to sing just like Caruso only by listening to the famous tenor in a Victor talking machine (*La Voz de la Victor,* Tomo XI, No. 3, September (1922), 2). See also: "Estudio de musica en las escuelas," Tomo XI, No. 4, December (1922), 10-13.

[50] Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 71–75.

established fact! To what extent? To the extent of four hundred and fifty cities."[51] Yet, as promising as it appeared to be in itself, selling Victor products to schools was not the only profitable outcome of the initiative. Turning children into both exponential advertisers and eventual consumers of Victor merchandise in their own right was indeed another subtle but profound intervention (Figure 14).

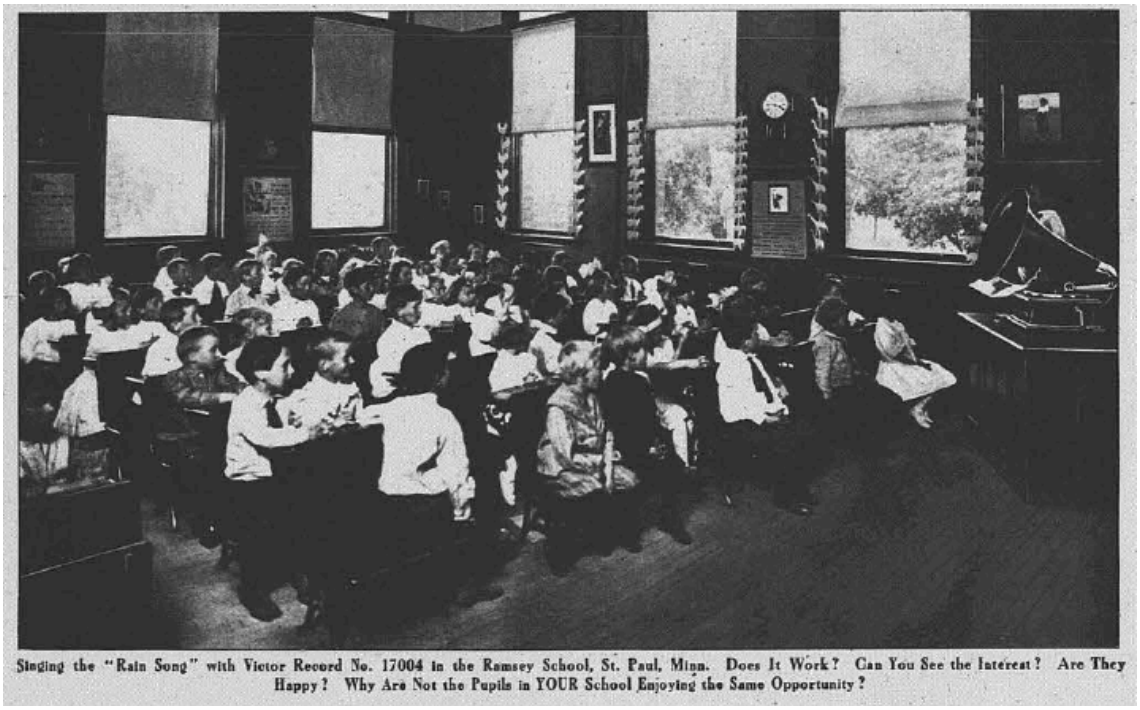


Figure 14: Classroom in the Ramsey School, St. Paul, MN
(*The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VII, No. 8, September (1912), 6).

In matters of international trade, Victor and other U.S. corporations of the early twentieth century managed to outmaneuver the traditional marketplace almost everywhere. As Victoria de Grazia explains,

> the solution was to create brand-name recognition, which involved new product development, intense scrutiny of consumer habits by means of psychological and social profiling based on opinion polls and statistical surveys, and a giant apparatus of salesmanship backed by favorable state and international regulation. All were designed to move brand-name goods

[51] "Seven Million Pieces of Advertising!" *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VII, No. 8, September (1912), 6.

> from their original manufacturers to their final consumers, securing their loyalty no matter how physically distant they were and diverse in culture.[52]

Brand recognition was indeed one of the most powerful industrial and social inventions of U.S. consumer culture, powerful enough to secure the dominion of its market empire. In the commercial battle over the purchasing habits of a new generation of consumers, the symbolic muscle of U.S. brands prevailed. The Victor Talking Machine Company, with its fox terrier Nipper's contemplation of a gramophone, signaling everywhere the trademark of "His Master's Voice," was by far one of the most successful contenders of the era (Figure 15).

Figure 15: "Nipper." Official trademark of the Victor Talking Machine Company.

[52] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 186.

The triumph of transnational brand-name marketing over the local marketplace would not only turn the latter into something obsolete—cast to the realm of tradition—but would guarantee for those brands a relatively uncontested monopoly in their respective industries. U.S. business took the lead by a combination of factors, all contributing in different ways to consolidate their brands in the consumerist imagination of buyers all over the world.[53] To begin with, the very idea of the ingenuity and superior quality of U.S. products was, many times, just a myth built out of the refashioning (and patenting) of standard products into novel appliances. That was the case, for instance, when refitting the vacuum tube for loudspeakers, electric phonographs, and radios, or with the use of cellulose nitrates for the production of phonograph records, camera film, and eyeglass frames.[54] More importantly, alongside intense advertisement, U.S. brands like Victor tapped into the new social paradigms of consumption and leisure-time use furthered by early-twentieth-century capitalism. By setting the standards of modern culture, or at least by being instrumental in their consolidation, transnational corporations in the business of "packaged pleasures"—from candy bars and sodas to cigarettes and phonographs—shaped new regimes of mass consumption, making available at any time and for an unlimited number of people what in the past had been only seasonal or elite-exclusive delights.[55] The expansion of U.S. consumer culture operated on the basis of making everyone either alike or distinct in their consumption patterns and tastes (cf. bodies, being clean, partying, looking modern, music, etc.) but a regular consumer nonetheless, within a seemingly limitless

[53] De Grazia, 187–204.
[54] De Grazia, 205.
[55] Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures. How Technology and Marketing Revolutionized Desire*, 10–19.

assortment of possibilities. Thus, it was upheld by discourses of democracy—understood here as the liberty to consume—as well as by the demands of an increasingly mobile and fluid society. Faster communications, ready transportation, and the portability of goods and entertainment became crucial issues when determining the relevance of material objects in everyday life.[56] Talking machines, for that matter, were some of the most representative commodities of their era. Victor not only capitalized on the imagined ideal of modern life—the soon-to-be-called "American dream"—by providing some of the crucial goods for the realization of such expectations, but almost single-handedly monopolized the access to those goods. Not that there were no other companies competing in/for the Latin American market, but few brands managed to reach the visibility and prestige that Victor had in the region.

Branding its products as downright novel even if they had been around for a long time was a constant in Victor's marketing. But such practice became more effective in terms of sales revenue as the company managed to create the illusion of a family-kind-of-link between the factory and the end-user; and with this, to craft the loyalty of the customer to the brand. "In principle," de Grazia writes, "to brand a product is nothing more than to imprint it with the identity of the producer."[57] It was not only that several customers across Latin American bought exclusively Victor products—or that such loyalty was in a way predetermined by the fact that Victor's talking machines only functioned properly with Victor's records, needles, and soundboxes. It was also that people across the continent regularly endorsed the brand and paid homage to it, either because the company arranged such laudatory

[56] See: Santiago Castro-Gómez, *Tejidos oníricos: Movilidad, capitalismo y biopolítica en Bogotá, 1910-1930* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2009); De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 206–7.
[57] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 207.

testimonies or simply because, for a variety of reasons, they felt compelled to do it. Besides devoting hundreds of pages to contextualize emblematic recordings and celebrate their musical prowess and sound quality, the Spanish edition of *The Voice of the Victor* frequently featured articles by composers, musicians, and other writers and celebrities dealing with a variety of musical issues as well as special reports on local merchants, records collectors, or visitors to the Camden factory, in all of which, in one way or another, the virtues of Victor's products were extolled—sometimes excessively.[58]

While enticing consumers with its brand, the apparent distinction of its Victrolas, and its exclusive catalogs of records, Victor also protected its trademark vigilantly and battled furiously for it whenever issues of infringement or improper use appeared on the horizon. Few animals have had their public image as jealously safeguarded as Nipper, the Victor company's iconic dog.[59] As de Grazia rightfully points out, "[p]romoting the brand was not just a defensive weapon to induce retailers to stock the item, but an offensive weapon to establish tight control over market shares, pricing, and the meaning of new goods. If the qualities of a particular product could be condensed into a single name or emblem so that people would buy the good because they recognized it, the company could establish what

[58] See, for example, from *The Voice of the Victor. Edición española escrita especialmente para la América Latina*: "La Victor y sus numerosos admiradores," Tomo XI, No. 2, Junio (1922), 16-17; "Popularidad de la Victrola y los discos Victor en la República Argentina," and "El Sr. Dr. Frank García Montes, de la Habana, Isla de Cuba, es un entusiasta de la Victor y un amante apasionado de la música," Tomo XI, No. 3, September (1922), 10-16; "Nuestra gacetilla comercial," Tomo XI, No. 4, December (1922), 14. After his visit to Victor's plant in Camden, the Chilean ex-president Arturo Alessandri regarded the company headquarters as "the Mecca" to which people from all over the world aspire to go (Tomo XI [sic], No. 10, (1925), 5).

[59] See: "Proper and Improper Use of the Victor Trade-Mark," and "Help Us Keep our Dog at Home," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. I, No. 3, July (1906), 1 and 8; "The Dog Listening to the Talking Machine Always Means 'Victor'," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. I, No. 4, September (1906), 3.

was in effect a monopoly and thereby prevent price alone from being the chief reason for buying its product."[60]

In such light, today's branding practices of transnational corporations in the world of media and entertainment, like Apple, may not appear as entirely original or innovative. As a matter of fact, it might be argued that the kind of distinction between, say, iPhones and other smartphones, is not substantially different from the kind of distinction that Victor managed to establish, by means of intense branding and marketing, between its products and those of other companies in the sound recording business. Thus, the consideration of the brand, more than a critical examination of the actual quality of the items, eventually became a decisive factor for countless consumers when purchasing one product over another. For example, from a technical point of view, cylinders were acoustically superior to discs, but the latter ended up dominating the industry due to its industrial and commercial suitability (i.e., duplication processes, handling, domestic storage)—but also because of the fortune that Victor invested in advertisement in contrast to Edison's reliance on the reputation of his own name. Likewise, although phonographs with an external horn offered a better sound than those with the horn enclosed, it was the latter kind, and particularly Victor's Victrola, which eventually succeeded in the marketplace, allegedly because of its alignment with bourgeoisie ideals of parlor furniture.[61] The relatively firm and unchallenged monopoly of the Victor company in multiple places across Latin America during the first three decades of the twentieth century might have been actually one of the most evident outcomes of its rationalized undertakings around branding.

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[60] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 208.
[61] Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*, 129; see: Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity"; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*; Leppert, *Aesthetic Technologies of Modernity, Subjectivity, and Nature*.

Ultimately, branding implied that many of the generic denominations of certain lines of products were in fact the name of a U.S. brand: Singer for sewing machines, Hoover for vacuum cleaners, Ford for cars, Gillette for razors, Kodak for cameras, Pianolas for player-pianos and, of course, Victrolas [or *vitrolas*] for talking machines.[62] Moreover, sometimes the word "American"—or the phrase "Made in the USA"—was inserted into advertisements, products, or in the names of local business to capitalize on the ideas of quality, originality, and "goodwill" associated with the merchandise imported from the United States.[63] Nonetheless, although the marketing dynamics pertaining to the completion of the cycle of extraction entailed the figuration of the resulting commodities in global circuits, local economies did not really partake of the profits. Whether they were natural raw materials or musical sounds, the incorporation of extracted resources into capitalist mechanisms of industrial production and massive consumption contributed, first and foremost, to the imperial growth of the multinational corporations that monopolized their commercial distribution, while, at the same time, consolidating the economic subordination of local labor and local industries.

More often than not, after a short-lived mirage of prosperity, most enclaves left behind nothing else than unfulfilled expectations and poverty—aside from corruption, violence, and widows. As Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez put it in his novel *Leaf Storm,* dealing precisely with the interactions between the

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[62] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 208; David Suisman, "Sound, Knowledge, and the 'Immanence of Human Failure': Rethinking Musical Mechanization through the Phonograph, the Player-Piano, and the Piano," *Social Text 102* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 14; Ospina Romero, "Ghosts in the Machine and Other Tales around a 'Marvelous Invention.' Player-Pianos in Latin America in the Early Twentieth Century."

[63] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 209, 214–16. In the end, the profitability of effective branding was not measured only in individual and cumulative sales, but it was represented also by the company's performance in the stock market or when big transactions took place. The multi-million sale of the Victor Talking Machine Company to the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) amidst the Great Depression, and that left Eldridge Johnson as one of the richest people in the U.S., was supported in many ways by the strong positioning of the Victor brand at the time.

fictional (and underdeveloped) town/enclave of Macondo and a metropolitan corporation in the banana business, "[t]he leaf storm had brought everything and it had taken everything away."[64] The "leaf storm" was indeed the corporation, a fictional depiction of the United Fruit Company. Rather than furthering a real integration of resource niches into national or global economies, enclaves were (and have been) more about "transforming their peoples and their landscapes in a merchandise for the global market; a merchandise fetishized by the magic of its image."[65] A panorama, in the end, not so much different from that of Jack London's excursion through the islands of the South Pacific, described in chapter two. Yet, notwithstanding the colonial character of these commercial enterprises, local actors, including the musicians engaged by Victor's scouts in the course of the recording expeditions, were active participants in the whirlwind of possibilities opened up by such transnational incursions. Thus, along with the imperial representatives, these performers set in motion an ample range of cultural, musical, political, and industrial processes. Let's turn our attention to some of them.

Transculturation, Talent, and Desire

Recording experts kept a detailed register of the performers and pieces they recorded each day while on an expedition. Interestingly, their scouting activities—or their pursuit of local talent—seemed to have matched, usually, with the aesthetic preferences of local communities. In other words, the artists they (or the intermediaries they worked with) managed to get into the recording laboratories

[64] Gabriel García Márquez, *Leaf Storm, and Other Stories*, trans. G. Rabassa (New York: Avon, 1970), 89; see: José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 26–29; Bucheli, *Bananas and Business*.
[65] Serje de la Ossa, *El Revés de La Nación*, 219.

were often times some of the most popular in their respective cities. Hence, it is not surprising that many of the names (and pieces) frequently mentioned in music histories of various Latin American countries are the same the scouts recruited for the recording sessions. These included, for instance, the orchestras of Lionel Belasco in Trinidad, Pablo Valenzuela in Havana, Luis A. Calvo or Alejandro Wills in Bogotá, the ensembles of the Hermanas Gastelú or the Estudiantina Chalaca in Lima, Pixinguinha or the Banda do Corpo de Bombeiros in Rio de Janeiro, and, in Buenos Aires, Angel Villoldo or Carlos Gardel.[66] These and many other performers and composers supplied sounding events in the recording enclaves set by the Victor company. Sadly, except for some studies focused on the experience and testimonies of working-class musicians at the time, we know little about the histories pertaining to those cycles of extraction from the perspective of the performers who made the recordings.[67] Some composers protested the misrepresentation of their music when re-arranged for and recorded by ensembles in the U.S. And some musicians let surface their resentment, more than their gratitude, for the commercialization of their music by Victor and other companies.[68] Unfortunately, those perspectives are hardly ever recorded in the corporate (read: colonial) archive. Still, even if surviving sources privilege the account generated by the transnational business, we must not take for granted the passivity of the subjects and societies exploited by extractive economies—including the discreet operations of Victor's scouts.

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[66] See, for example: Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*; Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*; Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*; Ospina Romero, *Dolor que canta*; Cortés Polanía, *La música nacional*; Borras and Rohner, *La música popular peruana*; Pérez G., "A indústria Fonográfica,"; Karush, *Culture of Class*; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*.
[67] See, for example: Hertzman, *Making Samba*.
[68] See: Cramer, "The Word War at the River Plate: The Office of Inter-American Affairs and the Argentine Airwaves, 1940-46."

Along with the power imbalances at stake, early-twentieth-century enclaves fostered exceptional cultural configurations in light of the dynamic interactions between the foreign and the vernacular as well as between world economies and local lives.[69] More importantly, political and economic domination did not necessarily imply effective cultural imperialism. In spite of the colonial patterns in place, local people forged their tastes and ideas in their own terms, and had control over the extent of their engagement with the culture and the economic capital of the foreign corporation. As a matter of fact, it was the local performers who often times took advantage of what was convenient for them from Victor, seizing or discarding its foreign resources—both musical and technological—as they pleased, but always transforming them and never simply receiving them passively. Such a picture may appear counterintuitive in the context of the conventional characterization of the political economy of extractive economies. However, as LeGrand explains, rather than merely "sleepy, tropical places suddenly penetrated by capitalism in the guise of a powerful foreign company" or "factories in the field" toiled by "updated, deculturated wage laborers," enclaves are indeed "areas of intense interaction between two or more cultures in contexts of unequal power and resources."[70]

While studying the way in which travel literature produced by Europeans about various parts of the world fostered a sense of entitlement over those places, Mary Louise Pratt coined the term "contact zones" to account for the "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—such as colonialism and

[69] LeGrand, "Living in Macondo," 334.
[70] LeGrand, 336.

slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today."[71] The areas of extractive enclaves—whether geographically grounded like the banana plantations of the United Fruit Company or mobile and inconspicuous like Victor's itinerant laboratories—were indeed contact zones, in which the interactions of peoples from distinct cultural backgrounds furthered scenarios of transculturation, despite the imperial, colonial, and exploitative dynamics in place. The notion of transculturation was originally introduced by the Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz as a way to question the concept of acculturation. Rather than taking for granted the passive transformation of one culture due to the influence and dominance of another, transculturation underscores processes of cultural encounter, cultural exchange, and cultural change as the result of a much more horizontal negotiation between two (or more) active cultures.[72]

The idea of transculturation challenges conventional analysis of center/periphery relations in which the latter is assumed as a passive receptive of the cultural contents of the first. From a transcultural perspective, the periphery might be an active actor re-signifying hegemonic cultural contents and even using them to resist the center or, as Alejandro L. Madrid puts it, transculturation may constitute a political move of "positioning and repositioning of collectivities in their pursuit of empowerment."[73] The incursions of Victor and other recording companies throughout Latin America did not only entail the expansion of their commercial empires and sales revenue. It also set in motion transcultural exchanges amidst which colonial subjects took ownership over metropolitan resources and modes of

[71] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7; see: Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession*, 1991, 34.
[72] See: Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint, Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 205.
[73] Alejandro L. Madrid, *In Search of Julián Carrillo and Sonido 13* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16–17.

representation. By virtue of those exchanges, they refashioned themselves, their cultural production, and eventually, their political and economic subordination in the global scenario. Not that they managed, to any significant extent, to succeed in transforming long-standing structures of colonial domination, but their engagement with modern technologies of sound reproduction constituted also an engagement in the potentiality of emancipation vis-à-vis the pursuit of self-representation even if across imperial networks of representation. What got to be recorded and how that figured in the globalizing ventures of the music industry was not the exclusive prerogative of the recording scouts—or of the Victor company for the same matter. The way in which local musicians and entrepreneurs partook in the recording sessions, as examined in chapter two, and the dependence of the company on them for the fulfillment of its global ambitions, entailed a dispute on its own in the arena of political economy. As Roshanak Kheshti eloquently puts it, "sound is a social formation that is constituted by struggle and struggled over."[74]

The recording expeditions constituted the condition of possibility for a unique kind of porous extractive enclaves. It was not simply about pulling out sounding events via the recording technology nor solely the imposition of metropolitan regimes of aurality or musical industrialization. The transcultural encounters generated by Victor's phonographic outposts channeled a bricolage of musics and performances as well as intentional and unintentional transactions around cultural capital that bypassed the control or the strategic plans of the company—as I discussed in chapter four. While Latin American artists embraced cosmopolitan identities and the opportunity of being part of international circuits by means of both Victor's imperial networks and the irrepressible dissemination of their music as

[74] Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*, xx.

commodity-records, local business and local music industries began to take off capitalizing on the technological, commercial, and discursive mechanisms advanced by metropolitan corporations. Not to mention the extent to which recorded sound was a catalyst for musical creativity in multiple levels, from the endeavors of particular individuals to the configuration of vibrant transnational scenes of musical hybridity. The Brazilian composer Pixinguinha and his ensemble the Oito Batutas, just to give one example, became one of the most influential bands in the region in the early 1920s, making recordings for Victor in Buenos Aires and touring extensively through Brazil, Argentina, and France, with a diverse and fluid musical lineup that included choro, samba, jazz, and Brazil's interior's *musica sertaneja*. As Micol Seigel argues, "the music they created," representative in many ways of the musical milieu of Rio de Janeiro at the time, "was in constant conversation across genre, regional and national borders, urban-rural distinctions, and metropole-periphery divides: unmistakably hybrid."[75] Likewise, the entrepreneurial activities of Frederico Figner in Brazil (Casa Edison) and Max Glücksmann (Discos Nacional) in Argentina, mentioned also in chapter one, constituted early challenges to the monopoly of Victor and other companies as well as crucial initiatives that prefigured the establishment of local industries in Latin America.

Pratt's analytical framework of imperial encounters as the production of contact zones of transcultural exchange implies thus that sound extraction was not exclusively a one-way process. Despite the imbalances of such exchanges in terms

[75] Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*, 96. On Pixinguinha and the Oito Batutas, see also: Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba*; Cristina Magaldi, *Music in Imperial Rio de Janeiro: European Culture in a Tropical Milieu* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2004); McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil*; Hertzman, *Making Samba*; Lisa Shaw, *Tropical Travels Brazilian Popular Performance, Transnational Encounters, and the Construction of Race* (Austin: University of Texas, 2017).

of their repercussion (or resonance!) in the context of the global political economy, recording artists managed to yield some dividends out of those (neo)colonial incursions. Roshanak Kheshti and Aaron Fox have shown that the act of recording certainly entailed the incorporation of localized sounding practices into modernity's ear—and hence the production of native performers as artists or Indians for either or both the archive and the (world) music industry.[76] Although Kheshti's and Fox's ideas refer specifically to the recording of the indigenous performers by ethnomusicologists and other sound collectors, I think they can also be applied to the case of Victor's commercial expeditions. To begin with, indigenous and urbanite performers alike were willing to be part of these imperial recording projects for their own reasons. For the Oito Batutas, just as for countless aspiring artists in Latin America, their own desire for cosmopolitanism was probably a key aspect in consideration; it may have also been that the uncanny and tantalizing capacity of the phonograph to preserve their artistry—or their immaterial culture as in the case of various indigenous communities—had been a crucial factor. They could not have anticipated the effects of surrendering their performances to the recording enterprises of ethnographers or scouts, but inasmuch as their sounding events came to be materialized for the imperial agendas of both academia and the record industry, making such recordings planted the seed for unforeseeable future undertakings.

It is maybe impossible to grasp the extent of these performers' awareness of the colonial paradigms of exploitation in place at the moment, but they took their chances anyway. The potential (or eventual) availability of these recordings and the histories about them played a significant role in multiple postcolonial and decolonial

[76] Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*, 36; Fox, "Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity."

processes of cultural revitalization. These included, on the one hand, projects for the "reanimation" of ethnic traditions and indigenous sovereignty, and on the other, the blossoming of musical movements and local commercial scenes based on the creative engagement with the music of their predecessors from one hundred years ago. But also, it allows for decolonial scholarly ventures aimed at the rectification of previous histories or interpretative frameworks. Decolonization is not a single event but an ongoing practice. As each generation fights their own battles and comes up with their own strategies of resistance and ways of engaging with the past, the archive might well be regarded as a repository of possibilities to advance decoloniality on a regular basis. The fact that the institutions that hold custody of archives—whether they be governments, scholarly organizations or media corporations—are still slow to repatriate recordings and facilitate access is a whole different story.[77]

Unfortunately, the voices of most of the musicians Victor engaged with in Latin America during the recording expeditions are irremediably lost in the archival record. The words of the grandson of a direct witness of the United Fruit's banana emporium in Colombia, however, may echo the opinion of some of the performers that the scouts met during their tours.

> We have always been receptive to the contributions of other societies (…) We copy, we assimilate, we recycle into something else. We are open but not submissive. It's impossible to dominate us. (…) The United Fruit Company had no concerted program of cultural change. They lived over there in their chicken coops. We didn't mix with them; we (pardon my saying this) never found their white women attractive; ours, yes, but not theirs. The only power the United Fruit Company had was the power of corruption and that was

[77] See: Fox, "Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity"; Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*; Beatriz Goubert, "Nymsuque: Contemporary Sounds of the Muisca Heart in the Colombian Andes" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2019).

> circumstantial. There was money to be made and some people here took advantage of the situation.[78]

It is almost impossible to determine to what extent or in which ways local musicians capitalized on Victor's recording adventures or, more particularly, how they took advantage of the extemporizing character of the quotidian operations performed by the recording scouts, discussed in chapter two. It is equally challenging to establish the degree to which the musicians may have consciously disrupted the scouts' plans or activities as a way to craft such an extemporaneous and flexible scenario, both inside and outside the recording laboratory. Still, it is safe to say that the recording expeditions were not only about the empowerment of a group of scouts by a multinational, colonial-minded corporation. The improvisatory dynamics that fueled the recordings channeled multiple instances of negotiation between the corporate representatives and their local collaborators, in many of which it was the knowledge and interests of the "colonial" subjects, rather than the expertise and instinct of the imperial delegates, that determined the course of the sessions.

All things considered, though, we should not lose sight of the context of imperial domination in which these seemingly decolonial instances took place: the configuration of the recording industry's global expansion as an extractive economy of talent. The scouts' multifaceted labor, I argue, reveal the figuration of talent as a form of capital to be produced and re-produced, along the lines of other imperial

[78] Javier Moscarella Varela, quoted by LeGrand, "Living in Macondo," 356. It interesting to note that while most of my research on Victor until this point has privileged, in a way, the company's perspective in light of the available documentation, LeGrand's has been built significantly on various interviews with descendants of workers of the United Fruit Company. To a certain extent, our research models may be informed by the nature and availability of the archives pertaining each company. Both narratives are mostly one-sided, but whereas LeGrand's is so because the United Fruit Company—or later the Chiquita brand—does not disclose its archives, my own research has been both limited by the scarcity of vestiges about the expeditions and potentiated by the finding of the recording ledgers and travelogues written by the scouts. Still, it is in the complementarity of both methodological approaches in which the complexity of the contact zones furthered by these kinds of imperial incursions, might be more productively revealed. (See also note 19 above).

enterprises of capitalist exploitation in the early twentieth century. To be sure, the establishment of talent enclaves and the transformation of colonial subjects into consumers of the goods they were helping to produce was, perhaps, the single most identifiable leitmotif of Victor's imperial growth.

Enclaves are usually assumed as confined spaces administered (or ruled) by foreign corporations, and as such, as foreign territories somewhat inserted into an otherwise sovereign nation. While the history of the expansion of the United Fruit Company through Costa Rica, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Colombia fits in many ways within that description, it does not do justice to the operation of Victor's enclaves in the region—especially in light of the transient character of each recording laboratory. However, even if not sharing the fixity of geographic zones or the continuity of other extracting procedures, Victor's incursions furthered a similar dynamic of foreign-shaping of local spaces in both material and symbolic terms. Setting up a makeshift recording studio entailed the configuration of various layers of foreignness within the ephemeral enclosed space presided over by the scouts. The very presence of the recording equipment and the myriad of alien accessories carried by the scouts, alongside the scouts' monopoly of the technical expertise, the language barriers, and even maybe a few dollars here and there, contributed to the symbolic constitution of the laboratory as a foreign area amidst a local community of artists.

It was not the same to be a banana worker dealing with U.S. administrators and witnessing the recreation of a foreign cultural milieu in the tropical landscape of Cienaga as it was being a musician in Bogotá and spending a few hours in a recording studio, following the directions of a couple of U.S. Americans tinkering with horns, needles, motors, wax discs, and reverberation. Yet, itinerant recording

laboratories fostered also imperial encounters with foreign materiality, cultural paradigms, and soundscapes, akin to those foreshadowed by more traditional and enduring enclaves. Thus, getting into the studio did not only produce artificiality, as discussed in chapter four, but implied a mediated and controlled access into the physical and symbolic realm of the corporation and, by extension, of the U.S., notwithstanding how removed these locales were from New Jersey: a symbolic experience probably not radically different from that of getting into one of the U.S. embassies in the region.

But a couple of issues still need to be addressed. The extractive dynamics advanced by Victor and other recording companies ignited the condition of possibility not only for the global dissemination of a myriad of Latin American musics, but for the eventual establishment of local industries via their appropriation of the technology of sound recording. As Steven Feld puts it, "[m]usical globalization is experienced and narrated as equally celebratory and contentious."[79] Thus, it might be problematic to account for the recording expeditions only through the analytical lenses of extractive economies. As much as Victor's operations exhibited many features that resemble those of transnational corporations invested in the extraction of natural resources, many others were profoundly different. For one, the inevitable panorama of eventual resource exhaustion, characteristic of many enclaves, is hardly ever an issue of consideration in matters of music and entertainment. In fact, the opposite seems to be true: "[t]he consumption of music does not reduce its supply."[80] The wide spread of recorded sound vis-à-vis the global expansion of entertainment industries set in motion a host of cultural

[79] Steven Feld, "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 146.
[80] Matt Stahl, "Response to the Panel: Talent and the Global Music Industries" (Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Albuquerque, NM, 2018).

processes correlated with the dynamic circulation of sound recordings, including the international popularization of local repertoires and artists, novel processes of musical hybridization, and the disruption of long-established regimes of musical visibility, availability, and respectability. Yet, even if not precipitating necessarily the extinction of vernacular musical practices, the intervention of metropolitan corporations over local musical scenes via recording campaigns and the retailing of acoustic records left behind a different kind of desolation. The exoticization of natural resources foretold a fate of invasion, extraction, economic dependence, depletion, death, and poverty. Similarly, the commercial display of Latin American musics in the form of commodity-records turned them—along with their original creators—into a consumable spectacle, malleable to the whims of metropolitan demand or corporate needs and frequently dispossessed from reproduction rights, royalties, and sometimes even from the very recognition of their authorship.

In this light, it might also be argued, against the framework of extractive economies, that the case of the recording expeditions more closely resembled pharmaceutical corporations patenting as their own what is in fact the ancestral medicinal knowledge of indigenous communities. Rather than an extraction-based economy, it would be essentially a matter of infringement (or stealing) of intellectual—or artistic—property rights. Clearly, music recordings are not the same as bananas. But neither are they like drugs. The changeability of the contents in music recordings, as opposed to the repeatability of bananas, does not restrict the first to realm of intellectual rights and the second to that of extractive economies. While making recordings in the early twentieth century implied, in many cases, the downright appropriation of a unique sounding event and its potential reproducibility, it was not that Victor no longer depended on the musicians' labor once it secured

the grooves in a wax master—as it might be the case with the pharmaceutical industries when they secure the patents. Victor not only depended on the unremitting provision of new recordings and hence on recurring expeditions to certain cities—or sites of extraction—like Havana or Buenos Aires, but often times the popularity of some musics (i.e. maxixe and tango) or some performers imposed additional and very specific demands on the company. It is worth remembering, for instance, that Enrico Caruso himself was inserted into the phonograph star system following a recording expedition led by Fred Gaisberg in 1902.[81] In Latin America, the artistry of performers like the duet of Rosales and Robinson, discussed in chapter four, as well as of Lionel Belasco or Carlos Gardel was an ongoing pursuit for Victor and other companies.[82] Thus, in an entanglement of corporate maneuvers that combined the metropolitan profit-making paradigms of intellectual property and extractive industries, it was primarily the labor-time of composers and performers (a.k.a Victor's "talent"), and a host of other formal and informal workers which constituted the "value-creating substance" that made the business lucrative.[83]

Although for Victor "talent" was essentially a marketing label for "musician," "performer," and more concretely, in political-economic terms, for people's labor, such designation tapped into the discursive properties associated with circulating ideas about musical talent; that is, talent as an abstraction for the immateriality of musical ability. From that perspective, once again, music and other sounding performances are absolutely unlike bananas, copper, oil, or other resource

[81] Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 105–7, 125–49.
[82] See: Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*.
[83] Karl Marx, "Commodities (The Capital, Chapter 1)," in *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 440–43.

endowments—even if materialized as sound recordings. Nevertheless, the figuration of musical talent as labor entails that the immateriality of talent is channeled through the materiality of human bodies. Being able to perform implies the disciplining of the body in the first place, so that the rationalization of the idea of talent as merit in the context of the value-producing dynamics of capitalism could take the form of the pursuit of labor-able and hence value-producing bodies.

Victor's marketing phrasing of talent may have actually been a fair description of contemporary practices of capitalist exploitation. It was not so much that people had talent or were talented—as in the commonplace use of the expression—but that people were talent. By this token, the bottom line of Victor's economy of talent was not really a continuum of better or worse musicality—even though Victor frequently graded artists or recordings. Rather, it was grounded on a binary distinction between being talent or not; so that, in the end, to be talent was less about being talented than being recordable. As a matter of fact, this characterization correlates with the scouts' recruiting decisions during the tours. Sometimes they discarded performances that were evidently badly rehearsed, but for the most part, instead of being driven by an attempt to fulfill any given expectations of aesthetic quality, musicality, or "talent," they recorded almost anything they found along the way—from jokes and monologues to dramas and music. And, as examined in chapters two and three, most of the selections they recorded during the tours ended up becoming commercial records.[84]

[84] The remarks that Matt Stahl graciously made in his response to my paper at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Ethnomusicology in 2018 were particularly useful for the development of this chapter, especially his ideas about the immateriality of talent, extractive practices, and labor, as well as the example of the pharmaceutics industry.

Recording technology and the imperial operations of the recording industry, I contend, offered new mechanisms for the configuration of colonial subjects alongside the values of U.S. consumer culture, modern entertainment, and the allure of cosmopolitanism. As Kheshti writes, "[i]n the process of being recorded (…) the other is brought under a form of discursive control (…) rendered legible (…), organized, and catalogued."[85] Furthermore, it is not only that the sounding events performed (or labored) by Latin American musicians and captured on wax by Victor's scouts constituted the basis for the production of difference as an aural commodity—or of an aurality of difference. With talking machines and recorded sound, Kheshti continues, "[d]ifference is offered as an object to be enjoyed by consumers not only within the privacy of their own homes but (…) as an object to be incorporated into the self."[86] Listening to foreign recordings, in other words, was both a potentially pleasurable activity for the body and a mechanism for the domestication of those sounds into the body—what Kheshti calls "aural incorporation."[87] Nevertheless, this process of sound domestication did not start with the consumer-listener. The aurality of difference imbued the recorded product with the identity of the producer, namely the recording scout and eventually the company. As such, it was another modality of branding.

While the commodification of Latin American musics in the form of acoustic records furthered processes of aural incorporation everywhere the records traveled, another kind of incorporation—or appropriation—took place in terms of music making. The attempt to play (or replicate) these musics elsewhere entailed a kind of dissociation from the site of extraction—in the fashion of a musical equivalent of

[85] Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*, 18, 22.
[86] Kheshti, 6.
[87] Kheshti, 13, 37, 40–41.

producing a synthetic version of a natural endowment. In fact, the alternative of getting music scores instead of recordings, so that these could be arranged for and performed by studio orchestras in the United States was somewhat of a common practice for Victor. The Colombian composer Luis A. Calvo, for example, introduced also in chapter two, was one of the performers scouted by Rambo and Althouse during their expedition to Bogotá in November of 1913, during which he recorded 21 selections. Sadly, three years later he got leprosy and, in light of the regulations and prejudices at the time, he was bound to confinement in a leper colony for the rest of his life. Hence, after 1913 he would never again set a foot in a recording laboratory, but his music, rearranged for various instrumental and vocal formats, continued to be recorded in New York and New Jersey by Victor studio orchestras and a wide range of artists. Between 1914 and 1929, Calvo's music was included more than 40 times in Victor's recording projects produced in the United States.[88] It might be reasonable to think of these post-leprosy engagements between Victor and Calvo in light of Stanyek and Piekut's notion of "deadness."[89] Although Calvo's physical body was still alive in the leper colony of Agua de Dios, his social being was dead due to the standing prejudices and anxieties regarding leprosy—the same prejudices and anxieties that upheld his confinement; or, his burial, as such imprisonment was commonly referred to at the time.[90] Thus, for the purposes of partaking physically in a recording session Calvo was dead, but the labor of his

[88] Ospina Romero, *Dolor que canta,* 107–112, 139, 186–187.
[89] Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54, no. 1 (2010): 14–38.
[90] In 1923, for example, the Colombian writer Luis Enrique Osorio published a novel titled *El cementerio de los vivos* [The cemetery of the living], inspired by the stories of the countless sick people living in the leper colony of Agua de Dios. Similarly, in 1940, a news reporter wrote: "Vivir en Agua de Dios es morir, y morir en la Ciudad del Dolor, es vivir. Por sus calles (…) discurre un constante desfile de gentes que se resignan a asistir al macabro espectáculo de sus propias honras fúnebres." [Living in Agua de Dios is dying, and dying in the City of the Pain, is living. Through its streets (…) there is a constant parade of people resigned to witness the macabre spectacle of their own funerals.] See: Ospina Romero, 145–46.

absent body still carried the potential for both intermundane recording collaborations with living human beings in the United States and the capitalist ventures of Victor's recording business.

The panorama of the recording expeditions and the marketing operations of the music industry, discussed in this chapter as a cycle of extraction, makes evident the simultaneity and complementarity of, at least, two economic regimes: on the one hand, a political economy of (neo)colonial domination based on the extraction and capitalist exploitation of talent—understood essentially as labor; and on the other, an economy of desire—or a "libidinal economy"—nurtured by the demand (and supply) of modern experiences, cosmopolitanism, and aural encounters with otherness. Although both economic regimes operated in tandem, despite the invisibility of the material and immaterial transactions around desire, the libidinal economy prefigured the political economy. The desire for modernity and cosmopolitanism along with the desire for cultural difference—or the "desire for the other in sound"—was a crucial cultural imperative for Victor's capitalization on and advancement of consumer culture on a global scale.[91]

Imperial encounters and dynamic interpellations between the local and the global channeled the expansion of recorded sound and its cultural legitimization everywhere within the milieu of modern entertainment. While Victor's recording expeditions operated by virtue of a constant negotiation between the scouts' expectations and culture-specific notions of artistry, the global dissemination of local musics as material records entailed the reconfiguration of these musics throughout unprecedented networks of cultural exchange. Undoubtedly, we

[91] Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*, 8; Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Madrid, *Nor-Tec Rifa!*, 25, 164.

continue to suffer and enjoy the consequences of those early transnational adventures of sound recording, as troublesome and fascinating as they were, to this very day.

Epilogue

In 1903, a reporter from the English journal *Talking Machine News* interviewed Edward D. Easton, founder and president of the Columbia Phonograph Company, whom the journalist described as "[a] quiet, resolute man, with a manner almost naïve in its simplicity; a man sure of himself; a man to be sure of; a man who knows what he wants, and makes straight for it, and as his life history shows generally gets it."[1] For the previous three weeks, Easton had been traveling through Berlin, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest, Venice, Rome, Florence, Lucerne, Paris, and London, "looking up [Columbia's] European connections." Easton, formerly a stenographer and an expert in Corporation Law, boasted that while many companies in the recording business had "vanished out sight and out of mind, (…) the Columbia Company has extended its operations, not only over the whole of the [United] States, but over the whole of the world."[2] In this, the reporter remarked about the immense factory owned by Columbia and the America Graphophone Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut, as well as about their "record making plants," and "sales depots" in multiple cities of Europe and in both coasts of the United States, "besides their London headquarters, and direct agencies in all the principal cities of the Colonies, and elsewhere throughout the world."[3]

Easton also referred to the company's international recording ventures, and took advantage of the opportunity to promote Columbia's most recent "catalog of

[1] "A Captain of the Industry. A Chat with Mr. E. D. Easton, of the Columbia," *Talking Machine News* (September 1903): 83.
[2] "A Captain of the Industry," 84.
[3] "A Captain of the Industry," 84.

Russian disc records, made by the principal Russian vocalists and instrumentalists, including the Czar's own band and his favorite operatic singers, some of whom had never before made a record for the talking machine." For that purpose, he added, the company had used "an entirely new disc record making process, the operations being superintended by our chief expert in this branch of the business."[4] Finally, the journalist asked: "you believe (…) that the talking machine has come to stay, that it will not be elbowed out by some new invention[?]" To this Easton replied: "there is only one contingency under which I can conceive that the talking machine will go under and that is—that people should be born without ears."[5]

Edward Easton—just as Thomas A. Edison, Eldridge Johnson, or any of the recording scouts we met in the last chapters—would never have anticipated the scope nor the dimensions that the sounding recording industry would take in the next century. But they were right about something: the talking machine business had indeed come to stay. As the corporate operations of Victor, Columbia, Edison, Gramophone, Pathé, Odeon, and other companies expanded internationally—at the same time that the records and machines they produced traveled without containment—it became increasingly impossible to escape the ubiquity and "the tyranny of recorded sound."[6] Not only did most of these companies build commercial empires of their own but sound itself became a ruling constituency in a new empire of the senses.[7] Thus, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, by virtue of corporate initiatives, transcultural engagements, and the configuration of new listening paradigms, both recorded sound and the recording industry became

[4] "A Captain of the Industry," 84.
[5] "A Captain of the Industry," 84.
[6] Millard, *America on Record*, 4.
[7] See: Radano and Olaniyan, "Introduction: Hearing Empire."

relentless imperial forces; and with them, phonograph culture became pervasive. The Victor Talking Machine Company, of Camden, New Jersey, was indeed a powerful player in the novel game of media entertainment during the acoustic era; a game, however, which rules were formulated and refashioned as it was being played. Yet, as Easton's testimony above insinuates, Victor was not the only player. Its pecuniary ambitions and imperial mindset were certainly shared by other corporations; and so were some of its marketing strategies, industrial mechanisms, and technical procedures.

But the journalist's description of Easton's personality also makes plainly evident another trait of the industry at the time, one that remained significantly unchanged for most of the twentieth century: women hardly ever appear anywhere, except as performers. Although the mechanisms of both recording technologies and media corporations changed dramatically, such was not the case with their gender politics. It is not only that all of the company's executives and seemingly all of the recording experts in the acoustic era were men—not to mention the almost total absence of women in sound engineering affairs after 1925.[8] It is also that most of the scholars, and authors in general, who have researched and written about the recording industry have been men.[9] The trailblazing work of Erika Brady, Susan Schmidt Horning, Emily Thompson, and others have been indeed opportune interventions and felicitous exceptions to the rule.[10] When it comes to sound

[8] See: Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*, 8–9, 56–77, 102–3, 104–39.
[9] It would make a very long footnote to reference scholarly works on the matter produced by (white) men. Almost any of my footnotes with references to secondary literature, especially in chapters one, two, and three would be a clear example, or the long bibliography at the end of the document. But it is not only about publications. It might be enough to take a look into the memberships, cast of speakers, and directive boards in academic and professional associations/conferences related to sound reproduction technologies or the music industry, to appreciate the ongoing reproduction of these structures of gender imbalance.
[10] Brady, *A Spiral Way*; Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*; Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity"; Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*.

recordings, both the scholarly field and the industry itself have been dominated by male gazes, male ears, and male incursions—such as the those of the Sooy brothers, Frank Rambo, George Cheney, Charles Althouse, and the other scouts we met in this dissertation. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that corporations and traveling representatives alike imagined, described, and marshalled their initiatives toward the conquest of musics, markets, and consumers in the global south in terms of "penetration."[11] In chapter five I compared the recording expeditions with the subtle operation of a sophisticated team of thieves. But it might be true as well that, along with stealing, it was a form of recurring rape.[12] Yet, in matters of historical representation, recording experts share with women the fact that those governing the narratives about the sound recording industry have also rendered them invisible. While the gender conundrum still awaits a much more thorough scholarly interrogation, I hope the pages in the preceding chapters can contribute to complete a portion of the historical picture regarding recording scouts during the acoustic years.

In a way, and inadvertently, the chapters in this dissertation progressed with a logic that resembles the historical configuration of recorded sound as a modern commodity, from the industrial conditions and the imperial mindset that made possible the business (chapter one) to the retailing and marketing mechanisms that nurtured an economy of talent and fueled the global circulation of acoustic records (chapter five and epilogue); a historical sequence with crucial processes and issues

[11] Emily Thompson, "Wiring the World: Acoustical Engineers and the Empire of Sound in the Motion Picture Industry, 1927-1930," in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann, English ed (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2004), 202.
[12] See Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 58–61; Nancy Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Register. Rape and Repetition in Congo," in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura. Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 39–66; Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 305–35; and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995).

in between: the pursuit of vernacular performers, repertoires, and markets (chapters two and four), the affordance of sound recording under changing material scenarios and technological standards (chapter three), and the constitution of novel cultural and listening practices around the phonograph or the incorporation of recorded music in everyday life (chapter four). In the remainder of this epilogue, I examine the transnational circulation of the acoustic records produced during the expeditions in light of two interrelated issues: the entanglement of practices of exoticization, appropriation, and misrepresentation—or what I call "orientalism on record"—and the significance of dance in the media-scape of the early twentieth century.

Orientalism on Record

The recording industry was global from its inception. Victor's recording expeditions through Latin America were crucial episodes in the company's international outreach—part of its shared attempt with the British Gramophone Company "to penetrate every possible market from Tibet to Bolivia."[13] More broadly, however, the expeditions followed suit on the globalizing trend and the pursuit for far-removed consumers that began, at least, with the public phonograph demonstrations sponsored by the Edison company to which I alluded in chapters one and three. Yet, it was not only that talking machines and sound recordings circulated and reached almost everywhere due to the imperial mechanisms and corporate initiatives of metropolitan companies like Victor, Gramophone, Columbia, or Edison. It was also that transnational networks for the incessant circulation of people, ideas, news, objects, and music had been in place for a long time before

[13] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 4.

the invention of the phonograph, and were particularly dynamic in the early twentieth century in light of geopolitical entanglements, international trade, human flows across national borders, and supranational movements around music, visual art, literature, anti-colonial struggles, and racial solidarity.[14] The world had been certainly interconnected. Nevertheless, while the commodities produced by the nascent media emporiums were inserted into and capitalized on such interconnectedness, they also furthered unprecedented transnational transactions around ideas of modernity, aesthetic paradigms, lifestyles, and political opportunity. If sound recordings were the audible emblem for a new era of global interactivity, cosmopolitanism was the lingua franca.

Historical archaeology, Pierre-Yves Saunier explains, nominally refers to archaeological endeavors pertaining to the 1600s onward; but also, in a more practical sense, it has to do with the consideration of the small things that are usually forgotten in the networks and circuits of colonialism.[15] These include such varied artifacts and vestiges as the waste remains of recent East Asian vessels off the coast of San Francisco, material culture related to the African diaspora and the slave trade or—why not—lists of songs and artists in obscure catalogs of Victor records. By looking into these catalogs, available in multiple languages and user-varieties, as well as in many other publications produced by the company—such as trade journals, and a host of ordinary and out-of-the-ordinary supplements,

[14] See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; May. Joseph, *Nomadic Identities : The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Sandhya Rajendra Shukla and Heidi Tinsman, *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*; Alejandro L. Madrid, ed., *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Shana L Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2013); and Shaw, *Tropical Travels Brazilian Popular Performance, Transnational Encounters, and the Construction of Race*.

[15] Saunier, *Transnational History*, 127–28; see: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972).

pamphlets, brochures, and booklets—it is possible to get a sense of the basic contours of these records' circulations.[16] As the company grew (and thrived), so did the amount and variety of publications, their number of pages, and especially the quantity, assortment, languages, and specificity in their lists of records, repertoires, artists, and genres available. Likewise, at the beginning the listings meant for a particular country of region included primarily the records made *in* or *for* those places and consumers—or what the company assumed were the most suitable contents for them. However, eventually (and progressively), most of these records, as well as the many that were produced year by year, began to appear simultaneously (and somewhat randomly) in the multiple catalogs, brochures, and record lists published by Victor, across languages, countries, marketing regions, and retailing categories. In other words, not only did the recordings made in one place become available in many other places, but the popularity (or lack thereof) that certain records and performers had achieved among audiences in one place was mobilized throughout many other places—even if to different and changing degrees of appeal. Although the promotion and availability of the records does not entail necessarily their circulation—or their consumption for that same matter—the transformations and growth of these catalogs make manifest the actuality of

[16] The publications of these sort that I examined in this research, dispersed in multiple archives, libraries, and personal collections, include the following: most of the numbers in the English edition of *The Voice of the Victor* (1906-1920); some numbers available from the Spanish edition of the same trade journal, meant for customers in Latin America (*The Voice of the Victor. Edición española escrita especialmente para la América Latina,* 1917 and 1922-1926); many and diverse records catalogs in English and Spanish produced by company between 1896—even before the constitution of the Victor company proper—and 1929, meant to either dealers or customers, and with different logics of internal organization (i.e. numerical catalogs, alphabetic catalogs, foreign and ethnic records, Red Seal label, etc.); monthly supplements of "Victor New Records" (October, 1909-July, 1914, 1922, and 1924); special supplements of records in languages other than English, meant for "foreign" audiences in the United States, or published for specific countries in Latin America (1906, 1908, 1916, 1917, 1919, 1922, 1923, 1924, and 1926); special issues and supplements on dance records, victrolas, or songs (1914, 1916, 1923, 1924, and 1941); and record listings included in newspaper advertisements in the United States and Latin America at the time.

material networks for these records' circulation and consumption. Ironically, even as these catalogs are somewhat ubiquitous, at the same time they have been rendered almost invisible in methodological terms—neglected in the dustbin of history.

Hispanic and Latin American musics made their way into the company's catalogs even before the constitution of the Victor brand proper. Already in 1899, Sebastian Yradier's widely popular song "La paloma," performed by Ferruccio Giannini in a recording made in 1896, was part of the "stock list" in a catalog of gramophone discs promoted, most likely, by the shared business of Emile Berliner and Eldridge Johnson.[17] By 1903 various "Spanish" numbers were part of Victor's lists of "Seven-inch Black Label Records," including "La damisela," "Tangos I," "El duo de la africana," "Ni[ñ]a pancha," "Marina," "Mujer y reina," and "El bateo."[18] From around 1905 and through the early 1920s, the recordings made during the Latin American expeditions appeared in record catalogs published by Victor and distributed in different places across the Americas. In 1908, for example, a supplement catalog of "Victor Records in Spanish, German, Italian, French, Hebrew, Russian, [and] Polish," included almost 70 recordings by the Orquesta de Felipe B. Valdés, all of which had been made by Harry Sooy in Havana the year

[17] "Stock List—Feb. 22nd, 1899. Record Catalogue." Special Collections, University of California, in Santa Barbara. "La paloma" was recorded a good number of times later by Victor and other companies in the United States and elsewhere, both in instrumental and sung versions, including the recordings made by the soprano Zélie de Lussan in 1903 (Victor 64003), La Banda de Zapadores de Mexico in 1905 (Edison 18734), la Orquesta Mexicana de [Carlos] Curti for Columbia also in 1905, the Six Brown Brothers in 1914 (Victor 17822-A), and the organist Jesse Crawford in 1927 (Victor 20586-B). On "La paloma," see also: John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge : The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30–39; Leonardo Acosta, *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop : One Hundred Years of Jazz in Cuba* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 7; Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 32, 88.

[18] "Numerical List (…) Seven-inch Black Label Records," [Victor Talking Machine Company, Catalog], ca. Nov. 1903. Special Collections, UCSB. In 1906, a list of records published in the second number of *The Voice of the Victor* included the "Himno nacional mexicano," a "Song of the guarachas," and other pieces in Spanish that were to be withdrawn soon from the company's catalog. See: Vol. 1 No. 2, May (1906), 11.

before—in the recording expedition to which he was sent right after the death of his six-year-old son, as we discussed in chapter two.[19] Similarly, six of the recordings made by the team of Frank Rambo and Charles Althouse in Bogotá, on November 1913, appeared the next year in a Victor catalog in Cuba: the bambuco "Peter" and the pasillo "Plenilunio" (Cuarteto Nacional), the bambuco "Qué delicia" (Terceto Sánchez-Calvo), the vals "Cuando el amor canta," and the bambuco "Dame un beso" (Quinteto Rubiano), and the pasillo "Nené (Grupo Rubiano)."[20] The same catalog included also recordings made in the expedition of 1912 to Buenos Aires, interspersed with recordings of Latin American music made in Victor's laboratory in Camden and many other records of popular and classical music produced by the company in the United States.

Dance was indeed a crucial factor in these waves of circulation and dissemination of acoustic records. From the first decade of the twentieth century, but especially in the season of 1913-1914, records of tango and maxixe made in Argentina, Brazil, and the United States were in great demand in light of the international craze for these and other "black" dance genres—arguably the first one of its kind in the age of recorded sound.[21] As Lara Putnam has shown, dance music was central in the configuration of a transnational paradigm of racial unity under the umbrella of aesthetic pleasure and expressive black popular culture. She writes, "[t]he creation and circulation of black-identified music and dance in the Jazz Age circum-Caribbean (…) generated both physical and mediated spaces for

[19] "Victor Records in Spanish, German, Italian, French, Hebrew, Russian, Polish, Gregorian Records, Red Seal Records" Victor talking Machine Company, January (1908), 6-7. Special Collections, UCSB.
[20] "Discos Victor 1914," Compañía cubana de fonógrafos, O'Reilly 89 y Obispo 88, Habana, Cuba. Special Collections, UCSB.
[21] Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*; Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas*; Shaw, *Tropical Travels Brazilian Popular Performance, Transnational Encounters, and the Construction of Race*.

considering commonality, building cohesion, and wrangling with external prejudice. But it did so not through printed words, but rather through embodied performance and irresistible sound."[22] Soon enough, however, it was not only about black dancing bodies. As I discuss in chapter two, while examining a photograph of native South islanders dancing hula to the sounds of a two-step on Jack London's talking machine, the traveling and imperial ventures of recording companies entailed the commodification of musics and dance moves, amidst other embodied cultural practices, vis-à-vis the exoticizing gaze of metropolitan entrepreneurs and consumers. Building on Edward Said's seminal work, I call this phenomenon "orientalism on record." In my view, it accounts for the imperial desire for the sounds and moves of the cultural "other," as well as for the manifold practices of appropriation, (re-)invention, and misrepresentation performed directly or triggered indirectly by the sound recording industry.[23]

Music and dance were indeed entangled, more often than not, in the same matrix of modern massification, selective racialization, and viral dissemination via the globalization of recorded sound.[24] Robin Brown has pointed out that "[a]s a musical form jazz emerged into a society where dancing was an enormously popular form of entertainment. The diffusion of jazz as music was, in large part, parasitic on the popularity of dancing."[25] Although Brown's remarks underscore, in particular, the relevance of dance for the dissemination of jazz since the late 1910s,

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[22] Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 153; see David F. García, *Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[23] Said, *Orientalism*; see: Fredrick B Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004); Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, *Tropicalizations*.
[24] Paula Harper, "Viral Musicking; Contagious Listening" (84th Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, San Antonio, TX, 2018).
[25] Robin Brown, "Americanization at Its Best?: The Globalization of Jazz," in *Resounding International Relations: On Music, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Marianne Franklin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 94.

I believe that his ideas are also pertinent and applicable to the case of tango, maxixe, and other musics entangled with jazz in the cultural and historical webs of the African diaspora and the nascent recording industry.

The sound recording business certainly capitalized on the popularity of dance, on the dance crazes, on vernacular dancing traditions, and on music's potential to prompt the body to move. Although the recording expeditions operated on the basis of a pursuit of musical novelty and a broad understanding of what music could mean in various places, as I argued in chapter four, the popularity and marketability of the records also relied on their capacity to instantiate sympathetic bodily responses—from listening to dancing. Victor's visual advertisements with ghostly or miniature figures of composers, performers, or opera characters were meant to be a sensorial remedy for the acousmatic experience of listening to a phonograph record; correspondingly, Victor produced a series of pamphlets to guide its customers' interactions with its dance records. In 1914, for instance, in the middle of the dance craze for tango, the company featured the famous couple of Vernon and Irene Castle in a leaflet titled "Three Modern Dances. One-Step, Hesitation, Tango." It opened with these words: "…the Victor Talking Machine Company presents this booklet of definite suggestions, illustrated by moving picture poses, which in conjunction with the perfect rhythm of Victor dance records, should make it no very difficult task to learn the steps of these dances."[26] Intricate descriptions of each move accompanied by a corresponding set of photographs of the renowned couple of dance instructors were paired, as expected, with a curated list of available records and victrolas (Figures 16 and 17). Likewise, the Spanish

[26] "Three Modern Dances. One-Step, Hesitation, Tango," Victor Talking Machine Company (1914), 3. Archive of Recorded Sound. Stanford University.

edition of *The Voice of the Victor* frequently featured articles, special record listings, images, and news intricately related to dance music.[27]

Figure 16: "The Tango," in "Three Modern Dances. One-Step, Hesitation, Tango," Victor Talking Machine Company (1914), 20-21.

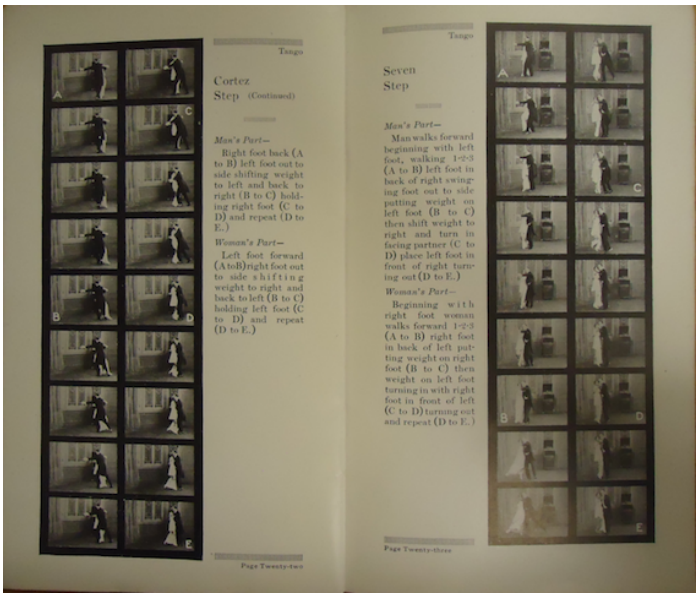

Figure 17: "The Tango," in "Three Modern Dances. One-Step, Hesitation, Tango," Victor Talking Machine Company (1914), 22-23.

Around 1913 and 1914, many of the original patents that guaranteed the monopoly of Edison, Victor, and Columbia in the previous decade began to expire. This

[27] See, for example: *The Voice of the Victor. Edición española,* Tomo XI, No. 1, March (1922) 2; Tomo XI, No. 2, June (1922) 10-15; and Tomo XI, No. 4, December (1922), 14.

turnover allowed for the incursion of other recording companies, many of which became directly active rivals in the market of dance records. Thus, stirred by the dance crazes and the increasing competition in the marketplace, but also by the financial prosperity that followed the end of World War I, the production of talking machine merchandise in the United States "increased from $27,116.000 in 1914 to $158,668,000 in 1919."[28] Yet, notwithstanding the companies' efforts to sell their records everywhere, their circulations went far beyond their direct commercial control or the prospects outlined in their catalogs. As Radano and Olaniyan explain, "technologies of musical circulation are not just materials or commodities but also conceptual categories."[29] Moreover, even if technologies flow in the first place from metropolitan factories to colonial markets, "[t]he relationship is not one-sided: the technologies help circulate the music, but music too was indispensable in the creation and dissemination of technologies, commodities, ideas, styles, and cultures of aurality, affect, and politics."[30] In this vein, besides the imperial figuration of recorded sound in the emerging world of media entertainment, one of the most discernible outcomes of the recording expeditions was, as I suggested in chapter four, an hitherto unparalleled global circulation of vernacular repertoires. Yet, it was not only about the dissemination of sound recordings but of mechanical reproduction more broadly, and with it, of new regimes of media perception—as I also proposed in chapter three.

According to Victoria De Grazia, "motion pictures were far and away the most remunerative cultural export [of the United States]. By the late 1930s they ranked fourth in value among all goods sold abroad. And geographically, American

[28] Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 191, see: 131-190.
[29] Radano and Olaniyan, "Introduction: Hearing Empire," 15.
[30] Radano and Olaniyan, 15.

film was the United States' most widely circulated commodity, second only to Gillette razors blades and Ford cars."[31] I would contend that the international popularity of talking cinema in the 1930s was contingent upon the international popularity of recorded sound at least since the 1910s, and the transnational networks of circulation of acoustic records and silent films. More interestingly, however, it is important to note that, rather than the byproducts of independent industries, films and records shared similar networks of dissemination, often times traveling together and being received together almost everywhere as, primarily and quotidianly, media commodities produced in the United States. Thus, what de Grazia points out about Hollywood film might be also true for the phonograph: "[a]s a good that presented itself at one and the same time as commodity and cultural artifact, it overrode national boundaries, eluded political controls, infiltrated local community, insinuated itself into private lives, and was suspected even of penetrating into the unconscious, especially of the most vulnerable individuals, namely women, young people, and children."[32] The industries of both talking machines and films were efficient in crafting a star system by virtue of which people around the globe became acquainted with, and even attached intimately to, a host of celebrities with whom they would never be able to interact in person. Furthermore, as I discussed in chapters three, four and five, technologies of mechanical reproduction connected peoples, places, and eras around structures of feeling, cosmopolitan aspirations, and experiences of modernity in unprecedented ways. Such virtual interactions, mediated by the consumption of sound recordings

[31] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 288.
[32] De Grazia, 288. See "How a Child Learns by Association," [or how a kid could become knowledgeable "without conscious effort" about opera, just by engaging with the phonograph]. *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. VIII, No. 6, June (1913), 16.

and films, turned out to be in themselves—deliberately or not—an effective strategy for the social reproduction of the business. Just as advertising and marketing mechanisms did—or in tandem with them—the star system and the formation of imagined media communities fostered consumers' loyalty to the brands as well as an affective attachment to media technologies and commodities, and ultimately, the incorporation and cultural legitimization of those same technologies and commodities into everyday life.[33]

* * *

As a monograph, this dissertation is about how one particular company set its recording studios on tour in the era of the acoustic phonograph. More generally, however, those recording expeditions offered an emblematic case and a point of departure for examining critically the globalization of recorded sound in the early twentieth century; an intellectual journey on its own around and across matters of imperialism, improvisation, phonography, transculturation, colonialism, decoloniality, capitalism, modernity, cosmopolitanism, desire, and even untranslatable jokes. Somewhat inconspicuously, just as the operations of extraction performed by the recording scouts in Latin America, this dissertation is also about the intersections of ethnography and phonography. In the fall of 1914, while George Cheney and Althouse were making recordings in Trinidad, Bronislaw Malinowski arrived in Papua New Guinea to do ethnographic fieldwork—the first

[33] See: Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 125–49; De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 298; Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London; New York: Verso, 2006). On Victor's own portrayal of Enrico Caruso as a recording celebrity, see: "The story of my life," *The Voice of the Victor,* Vol. II, No. 4, July (1907), 4–5; and Vol. IV, No. 6, November (1909), 2.

fruits of what would be rendered from then on as the anthropological paradigm of intensive research in a single place.[34] Uncertainty and improvisation loomed large in both enterprises. As with Cheney and Althouse—or even Raymond Sooy's crossing of the equator four years before—Malinowski simultaneously knew what to expect but did not know how things were going to actually play out, or what kind of quotidian maneuvers he would need to perform for the fulfillment of his plans. Even more so, despite the seemingly robust methodological paradigm that he would eventually present in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski did not really have a clear idea of which his plans were.[35] In more than one way, while the mission of Victor's scouts inadvertently entailed unmistakable ethnographic overtones, the undertakings of Malinowski and other ethnographers of his generation were informed by imperial and colonial dynamics—not to mention material and intercultural challenges—strikingly similar to those inherent in the transnational ventures of recording scouts. Most likely, however, they had no clue about each other's endeavors.

Malinowski probably did not carry a phonograph with him to the Trobriand Islands, but many of his colleagues in other parts of the world engaged with the technology of sound recording as a crucial tool in the field. It is not only that ethnographers and recording scouts shared the same technology, and hence, very similar technical trials and procedures. It is also that both ethnographic fieldwork

[34] Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); Michael W. Young, "The Intensive Study of a Restricted Area, or, Why Did Malinowski Go to the Trobriand Islands?," *Oceania* 55, no. 1 (1984): 1–26; Richard Lansdown, "Crucible or Centrifuge?: Bronislaw Malinowski's A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term," *Configurations* 22, no. 1 (2014): 29–55.

[35] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, ltd., 1922); Raymond Firth, "Introduction [1967]," in *[Bronislaw Malinowski's] A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), vii–xix; Lansdown, "Crucible or Centrifuge?"

and recording expeditions prefigured—together and in various ways not quite yet disentangled in the scholarship—the commercial and political scene of world music.[36] But in bringing ethnographers and scouts together, there is also something else to say about this dissertation. It is a personal tale of interdisciplinarity. The story of my own ethnographic excursion to Barranquilla, at the beginning of the Introduction, became eventually one of the first of many subsequent disciplinary intersections—the realization that life, yesterday as well as today, is experienced as a chaotic entanglement of economic aspirations, political frustrations, emotional conflicts, musical audiotopias, unforgettable dances, and more. That was indeed how Edison, Johnson, Althouse, Riega, Rosales & Robinson, and the many other characters in these pages lived. And not only them, but the nameless people who listened to acoustic records in the early twentieth century, and whose experiences with those sounds we can barely grasp.

[36] See Terence Wright, "The Fieldwork Photographs of Jenness And Malinowski and the Beginnings of Modern Anthropology," *JASO* 22, no. 1 (1991): 41–58; Brady, *A Spiral Way*; Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*; and Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Músicas locales en tiempos de globalización* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2003).

Appendix:
Chronology Victor Recording Expeditions through Latin America, 1903-1926

The following information was consolidated in light of various sources, including the recording ledgers of the Victor Talking Machine Company (SONY archives), the memoirs of the Sooy brothers, the evidence gathered by Hugo Strötbaum in "Recording Pioneers," and the *Discography of American Historical Recordings* (DAHR)—the database administered by the University of California in Santa Barbara. Unless otherwise noticed, the dates correspond to the actual recording sessions, as registered in the recording ledgers and in DAHR. When the dates of the trips are known these appear in brackets.

#	Year	Dates	Country	City	No. of recordings	Recording scouts	Observations
1	1903	Unknown	Mexico	Mexico City	Unknown	William H. Nafey	This trip is mentioned by Paul D. Fischer based on his research on the Sooy brothers' memoirs and other testimonies. Apparently, there are no surviving ledgers.
2	1905	July 17–27	Mexico	Mexico City	191	William H. Nafey and a Mr. "Rous"	In 1905, Henry Hagen made an expedition to Cuba while working for the Zonophone Company—which Victor purchased in 1910. See: Harry Sooy's *Memoir* (c.1925), 32, 44. In 1906, George Cheney went to China, also while working for Zonophone.
3	1907	March 4–15 [February 23–March 31]	Cuba	Havana	146 [171]	Harry Sooy	Several registers appear simply as March 1907. The mention to 171 recordings comes from H. Sooy (p.34)
4	1907	July 5–24	Mexico	Mexico City	195 [207]	Harry Sooy	Some registers appear simply as July 1907. The mention to 207 recordings comes from H. Sooy (p.36)
5	1907-1908	[September 7–c. January 20]	Brazil and Argentina	-Rio de Janeiro (November 1-22) -Buenos Aires	226 + 73	William H. Nafey	Most registers appear simply as either November 1907 or December 1907.

				(December 21-January 9)			
6	1908	October 12–November 9 [September 24–November 21]	Mexico	Mexico City	118	Raymond Sooy	114 recordings in R series, 3 in the O and S series that appear as from 1908, and 1 “unconfirmed” in the R series. In July 1908, W. Nafey went on a recording expedition to China, and the same year Henry Hagen went to Mexico (for Zonophone).
7	1909	January 30–February 11 [January 16–February 17]	Cuba	Havana	122	Raymond Sooy	120 recordings plus 2 “unconfirmed.”
8	1910	February 24–April 6 [January 20–May 5]	Argentina	Buenos Aires	426 [424]	Raymond Sooy	Three recordings are registers as having been made in Havana on February 6 and 7, but probably it was actually February 1909 or 1911. The mention to 424 recordings comes from Raymond Sooy’s *Memoirs* (c.1925).
9	1910	November 5–28	Mexico	Mexico City	182	Raymond Sooy(?) Henry Hagen(?)	
10	1910-1911	January 4–February 14 [December 29–February 21]	Cuba	Havana	156	Henry Hagen and Charles Sooy	
11	1911-1912	[November 20–June 24]	Argentina and Brazil	-Buenos Aires (January 2–March 4) -Rio de Janeiro (April 18–May 27)	541 + 255	Henry Hagen and Charles Althouse	Three of these recordings (matrixes H-701, H-702, and H-703) appear in DAHR as made in Buenos Aires but they that might be a mistake. Their date is a month after the last recording in Buenos Aires and on the same day than the first recordings in Rio, not to mention that the performer appears later on other recordings made in Rio during the same fieldtrip.

12	1913	March 15–26 [March 1–April 2]	Cuba	Havana	120	Harry Sooy and Frank Rambo	
13	1913	[July 13–December 11]	Peru and Colombia	-Lima (September 5–25). -Bogotá (November 4–19)	202 + 120	Frank Rambo and Charles Althouse	
14	1914	[c. June 20–October 2]	Cuba and Trinidad	-Havana (June 27–July 3) -Port of Spain (September 3–16)	99 + 83	George Cheney and Charles Althouse	Includes matrix G-182 (Lionel Belasco playing Maple Leaf Rag). In 1915, Cheney and Althouse went on an expedition to China, Korea, and Japan.
15	1916	October 17–November 15 [c. October 10—November 21]	Cuba	Havana	186	George Cheney and Charles Althouse	
16	1916-1917	[December 30–February 15]	Puerto Rico and Venezuela	-San Juan (January 10-13) -Caracas (January 25–February 2)	61 + 57	George Cheney and Charles Althouse	
17	1917	[March 3–November 22]	Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador.	-Buenos Aires (April 23–May 19) -Santiago (June 14–28) -La Paz (July 18–26) -Arequipa (August 7–10) -Lima (August 22–September 16) -Guayaquil (October 5–31)	197 + 102 + 73 + 63 + 157 + 155	George Cheney and Charles Althouse	
18	1918	February 7-26	Cuba	Havana	125	George Cheney and	

		[January 19–March 4]				William Linderman	
19	1919	May 7–June 13 [April 19–c. June 20]	Cuba	Havana	96	George Cheney and Charles Althouse	It includes 18 recordings made by the Orquesta de Felipe Valdes, registered in DAHR as made in "Yucatan, Mexico [unconfirmed]," although I believe they were made most likely Havana as well.
20	1920	May 31–June 14 [c. May 12–June 21]	Cuba	Havana	62	George Cheney and Charles Althouse	
21	1921	March 7–19 [c. March 1-March 29]	Cuba	Havana	58	George Cheney	The place of various recordings is marked as "Havana (unconfirmed)," as the information came from Cristobal Díaz Ayala and the ledgers seem to be lost. However, Cheney's passport information seems to indicate that Havana was indeed the place.
22	1923	March 8–27 [February 24–April 3]	Cuba	Havana	55	George Cheney and Louis (or Lewis) Layton.	
23	1924	March 21–April 17 [March 15-c. April 27]	Cuba	Havana	50	William Linderman and Edward J. Eckhardt	In 1924 and 1925, Linderman also went on a recording expedition to China and what is today Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.
24	1925	April 14-18	Cuba	Havana	21	Unknown	
25	1925	October 29–November 5 [c. October 20–November 10]	Cuba	Havana	29	Charles Althouse	The place for these 29 recordings appears as "unconfirmed" in DAHR as no ledgers are available, but Althouse's passport information indicate that he indeed made such an expedition.
26	1926	November 26–December 16	Mexico	Mexico City	75	Unknown	Between 1922 and 1928 Victor made 1650 recordings in Buenos Aires. These recordings were made in the studios set by the company in Argentina. Althouse,

							Cheney, and Layton contributed significantly to these recording endeavors. (See: Cañardo, *Fábricas de música*). Yet, “Buenos Aires” as the place for many of tehse recordings appears as “unconfirmed” in DAHR, considering that the original ledgers seem to be irremediably lost. Apparently, there were other recording expeditions to Havana in March 1927 and in January-February 1928, and to Santiago (Chile) in the “winter” of 1928.

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